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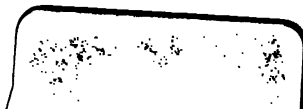
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THE
VICAR'S GOVERNESS.

A Novel.



BY

DORA RUSSELL,

AUTHOR OF "THE MINER'S OATH," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE VICAR'S GOVERNESS.

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN CLAYTON'S WIFE.

13 **A**DELAIDE MANNERS was waiting on the platform when the four o'clock train reached Narbrough station on the following afternoon, and when George got out of it she advanced quickly towards him.

"You have come," she said, holding out a trembling hand, but even in her excitement she noticed how cold his felt to her touch.

"I am sorry to pain you," she said, in a low tone; but he only made an impatient gesture in reply, and in silence the two walked out of the station, and went on the high road together.

"What is it, Adelaide?" then George asked, nervously. "You surely would not have written as you did unless you had some powerful reason?"

"What more powerful one could I have,"

answered Adelaide bitterly, "than to save my only brother from the toils of one of the vilest women upon earth?"

"What do you mean?"

"This, George—look," and she drew out the copy of Miss Williams's letter to Sir Hugh; "this is from the woman you thought so highly of—to Hugh Manners."

"It is not her handwriting," said George sternly, after he had read it. "What do you mean, Adelaide? What schemes are you planning? Take care what you do, for I will bear no trifling."

"It is no scheme," replied Adelaide, passionately. "It is true—too true; these very words came to him, and I copied them, and even now this is why I sent for you; but come with me, and you shall see with your own eyes that I am not telling you a lie."

"I will be no spy—no spy on any one; and how came this into your hands? How did you see the original?"

Adelaide blushed a burning crimson all over her face.

"Papa came," said she, after hesitating a moment, "and told me a correspondence was being carried on between this woman and Hugh. He had seen a letter to her from him; I would not believe it." (George gave a kind of groan as she spoke.)

"I was even beginning to like her ; they said she had been so attentive to Mrs. Manners and that little girl ; but in the afternoon after papa was gone, they brought in a letter and gave it to me. It was for Hugh, who was out, and was from Miss Williams. I knew her handwriting in a moment—and—and George I thought of you ; I could not bear you to be any longer deceived ; I opened it, and these here are the exact words."

"It was a shameful action," answered George, looking at his sister with the strongest indignation written on his face. "A low, mean, vulgar action ; I am ashamed of you, Adelaide."

"It was for your sake."

"For mine ! Don't lie to me, girl ; it was because you were jealous of Hugh Manners."

"And if I were ?" said Adelaide, bursting into passionate tears, "what then ? Have I not known him long enough ? Has he not been near enough and dear enough to me ? George, you are cruel, very cruel, to taunt me with this !"

"Hush—don't cry—don't, Adelaide. I am sorry if I have vexed you, but before I would have opened another person's letter I would have——"

"I did it, so there's an end of it. Hugh will never know ; and, George, you will come ? You will come round by the links, and see these false two meet ?"

George hesitated.

"Why should you not?" continued Adelaide.
"What honour do you owe them? They have both tricked and deceived you."

"There is some mystery," said George, gloomily.

"Yes; and both intend to make a fool of you."

George reddened and bit his lips.

"It is an unmanly action," he said; "yet when I think how this girl has——"

"Pretended she loved you," put in Adelaide.

"Yes!" said George, breaking forth suddenly and passionately; "yes—a hundred times—a hundred times! Adelaide, she has let me kiss her and hold her to my bosom; she has lain her cheek against mine. If she is anything to Hugh Mansers now, anything to another man, she is false as hell!"

"Come and see," said Adelaide; "satisfy yourself—and if I have done wrong, I at least will have saved my only brother."

George made no answer, and Adelaide, putting her arm through his, led him rather a circuitous walk round the opposite side of the links to that nearest the sea, and then passing beneath one of the hillocks, pointed to a little valley in the sandbanks, where they could sit and very distinctly see the end of the crossing through the links, which Miss Williams had in her letter indicated as the spot where she wished Sir Hugh to join her.

"I saw this place this morning," said Adelaide; "we can wait for them here—they will never see us."

"It is an honourable post," said George, bitterly, "but for the first and last time I'll satisfy myself. If she comes I will never see her more—if this is a scheme of yours, Adelaide——"

"Well?"

"You and I will say a long good-bye."

"You will see—perhaps you will believe me before—before long."

It was a cold, biting afternoon, and George shivered as he sat.

"What motive has she?" he thought; "what possible motive—except perhaps Hugh Manners is tired of her, and I, poor vain fool, had to be the victim. I had to marry my cousin's mistress;" and even Adelaide's heart misgave her, as she saw the fierce look of mingled passion and despair which her brother's strong features showed as he sat there, turning his face with restless misery to the sea.

They did not wait long, not more than five minutes had elapsed, before a slight, girlish, drooping figure emerged from the crossing through the links which Adelaide was watching, and came slowly down towards the sands.

"You see," whispered Adelaide, laying her

hand on George's in her excitement; but he flung it back, as if her touch was hateful.

"I told you," said she, with a sort of triumph glittering in her dark eyes; but the next minute her face changed, for she had seen the dull, leaden hue which had spread over her brother's, and with some kindness in her voice she added—"she is not worth grieving for, George."

"It is easy to say so," he answered, turning away his head, and with feelings of overpowering bitterness swelling in his heart.

"There is Hugh," said Adelaide faintly, the next minute, and George once more turned round his head.

They were close to them, at least close enough to see every attitude; yet neither Sir Hugh nor Miss Williams on the sands below could possibly see them, so hidden were they by the sand-banks, and it struck George, even in his misery, that it was cowardly thus to watch them.

"I've seen enough," he said; "let us go home, Adelaide."

"Oh! stay—stay—a few minutes; look how earnestly she is asking him to do something—see, he is taking her hand!"

"Come home," said George hoarsely, starting to his feet, and striding rapidly away without casting another look behind him; while Adelaide, who

would fain have lingered, reluctantly rose also, and followed him as he went.

"Adelaide," said George, pausing for her to overtake him, "let this be a secret between you and me."

"What! Do you not mean to resent it?"

"I mean I shall never willingly see her again—yet neither willingly would I take the bread from her lips."

"You mean—you cannot mean, you wish her to stay on at Narbrough?"

"Fix it yourselves; as long as she is here I shall come home no more; but I want you to remember also, Adelaide, that she is dependent—that whatever she is——"

"Let Hugh Manners provide for her," scornfully interrupted Adelaide; "when I go home to-morrow, I shall tell papa either she or I do not sleep beneath his roof."

"Would you, then, fling her back on her sin?" said George, sternly; "on her sin or her folly—God knows which—but would you cast a poor weak woman out on the mercy of a heartless world—or worse, on that of a heartless man?"

"See to it yourself, then," said Adelaide, sullenly; "I wash my hands of it."

"You forget the means you have used?"

Adelaide was silent.

"Adelaide," said George in a few minutes, in a different tone, "among this man's many wrongs, has he injured you?"

"Oh! don't, George—oh! don't," she answered, with much emotion.

"Has he sought to make you love him?" went on George, his eyes flashing dangerously as he spoke. "Has he won you, and flung you away—as he has done others—as he is doing now to that lovely fisher-girl, Peggy Richardson?"

But Adelaide made no reply to her brother's questions—only putting her hand in his, as if imploring his forbearance.

"Tell me, Adelaide," said George, earnestly, "for your wrongs I can resent. You have a brother; you are not a poor, friendless girl, whose feelings he can excite and trample on. He shall answer to me, at least, for you."

"No, no," said Adelaide, "no, dear George. Think, he is the only one of that family left—the only one of those who were as brothers to us; and think, too, of poor aunt and uncle. Let me make no quarrel between you."

George looked at his sister long and silently, and then, with some gentleness, he said—

"You know best what has passed between you. But, Adelaide, leave his house at any rate; you will surely leave his house?"

"It was fixed we should stay till to-morrow," she answered; "would it not be better, if nothing has to be said, at least to remain till then? In the meantime may I see papa? May I urge him to ask Miss Williams to leave?"

"I will write to her," said George, gravely, "and then she will understand. No, Adelaide, you had better say nothing to my father."

"But if she does not go?"

"It will be time enough then; and now, Adelaide, good-bye. I have changed my mind, and will not go home to-day. I will catch the next train back, and let this miserable afternoon be a secret between us."

"Oh! George, I am sorry to part with you," said Adelaide; "come home, or let me go with you."

"No," and he stooped down and kissed her cheek; "no, Adelaide. Good-bye, and take care of yourself;" and, once more shaking her hand, he went on his way to the station, while Adelaide returned slowly to the hall.

In the meantime, Sir Hugh and Miss Williams were still talking together on the sands.

They had met with some embarrassment, on the side of the lady at least, and Sir Hugh noticed immediately how greatly changed she was in appearance.

"I trust you are better?" he said, with some kindness in his manner. "I was truly sorry to learn from your note of yesterday that you had been ill."

"I am better," said Miss Williams, looking at him with her sweet and touching face, "but I could not come on Friday afternoon, as I first fixed, for on that day I was very ill."

"I thought something must have prevented you coming," said Sir Hugh, "for I went, of course, as in duty bound. By-the-bye," he added, with a sort of laugh, "George Manners saw the boy give me your note; and I was sorry for him, poor fellow, he looked in such a rage."

A deep burning blush spread over Miss Williams's face as Sir Hugh said this.

"He saw that?" she said, nervously.

"Yes, but I said it was about some books you wanted. Honour among thieves, you know, Miss Williams."

"Sir Hugh," she answered, "I have long, very long, wished to speak to you; ever since the night when you left no doubt in my mind that you had met me before."

"And you really did not recognise me?" asked Sir Hugh.

"No, certainly not; no, I cannot even now recall your face; but I suppose you know——" and

she hesitated. "I suppose it was not a chance guess?"

"I have the honour," said Sir Hugh, with a kind of mock courtesy in his tone, "to be speaking to the lady whom I frequently saw—and once or twice met in Calcutta—as Mrs. Clayton."

"What do you know of my miserable story?"

Sir Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

"India is a sad place for gossip, you know, Mrs. Clayton," he said.

"Hush," said Miss Williams, looking nervously round, "hush, Sir Hugh; do not breathe that name. I hate its very sound."

"You mean Captain Clayton's?"

"Yes," she answered, and the bright colour which had flushed her face during the excitement of the interview died completely away as she spoke.

"I knew him but slightly," said Sir Hugh.

"Where is he now? Do you know? I never dare to ask. It would kill me, I think, if I were to see him now."

Sir Hugh looked at her curiously.

"What have you heard of me?" said Miss Williams, noticing his expression. "What shameful tales, Sir Hugh? Will you tell me the truth?"

"Why revive old scandals?"

"Because I wish you to know my story; to

know I am not quite unfit at least to be in your uncle's house."

"Why, dear girl, I've no objection in the world to you being there, though I must own I would be sorry if——"

"If what?"

"Well, don't be offended, but if George Manners——"

"What of poor George? Do you mean you would be sorry if George Manners were to marry me?"

"Well—yes."

"It is hard, very hard," said Miss Williams, turning away her head, while tears rose in her eyes, "to be so cruelly wronged as I have been."

"What was it?" said Sir Hugh. "Don't cry pray, Miss Williams. What was the story of the other wife, or the other lady? What, in fact, was the truth of the story, for most likely I don't know it?"

"But what did they say of me?"

"They said—but I daresay it was a pack of confounded lies—that Clayton, who was known, or at least supposed to be, a married man separated from his wife, when he joined the regiment went to England and brought back a new and very pretty wife, of whom he was excessively jealous; and he then gave out the first wife was dead, or at least

insinuated, I believe, that she had never been his wife at all; but she was dead, he said, and one fine morning at Calcutta—but, by Jove, I needn't tell you your own story."

"Shall I tell you it, Sir Hugh? shall I tell you the truth?" said Miss Williams, much agitated, and sitting down on a piece of rough shingle at her feet, for she felt as if she were unable any longer to stand. "Shall I tell you a cruel story, a miserable, guilty tale?"

"Yes," said Sir Hugh, "but don't distress yourself; my lips are sealed; you may trust me; and had it not been that old George and I are like brothers, you might have treated him as you pleased."

"You need not have been afraid; yet how dare I say it! You are right, Sir Hugh; I have treated your cousin at least foolishly."

"He's horribly spoony on you, you know."

"I have wronged him," said Miss Williams, bitterly; "but I too was wronged more cruelly than any man could be."

"Did you not know about Clayton's first wife?"

"Did I not know, Sir Hugh!" retorted Miss Williams, with much indignation; "for what do you take me?"

Sir Hugh smiled.

"People said you knew," he said, "and—well,

that your marriage was a humbug from beginning to end."

"Oh! my God! this is too much," cried Miss Williams, rising excitedly. "This is for my weak folly in not proclaiming my wrongs from one end of India to the other. Mrs. Ross urged me vainly to defend myself, but I was so crushed, so utterly crushed, I only sought to hide myself for ever."

"You never guessed Clayton was married then?" asked Sir Hugh, with much interest.

"How could I dream of such a thing? I met him in society—at a military ball first, and afterwards he used to come to Westport, where we lived; and till that wretched day, when that unhappy woman came, I looked upon myself—how could I do anything else?—as his wife."

"It was a d—— piece of scoundrelism on his part, then!"

"It was worse than if he had murdered me," said Miss Williams; "more cruel, more bitter than death!"

"I never cared for him," said Sir Hugh; "but how odd you have so entirely forgotten me? To be sure, I had only been a few weeks in Calcutta when it happened."

"I remember, I think, hearing of a Mr. Manners in the regiment; but it is not an uncommon

name, and there were so many officers always about, and my—and Captain Clayton hated for me even to speak to any one—so I could never have noticed you.”

“Not very flattering,” said Sir Hugh, half-annoyed.

“I remember so few—only Captain Donovan and Captain Lowry, I think—and there was a Mr. Norman; but they are the only ones I should know again.”

“You weren’t very often to be seen, certainly, except driving or riding with Clayton.”

“He was mad, I think. Yes,” and she shuddered, “when I think of those days, I feel grateful, even in my shame and degradation, to have escaped from him for ever.”

“He was like a madman, certainly, after you left, they said.”

“I know—I was not so far away. Did any one ever guess—a month after I left my home I was still in Calcutta—I had one friend there, and she gave me shelter?”

“Mrs. Ross?”

“Yes; she and Colonel Ross at least believed in my miserable story. They secreted me in their house, for Captain Clayton swore to me that if I left him he would take my life, and it was not safe an hour—I feel sure of that.”

"They said he was in a frightful way, I remember."

"I stole out. Oh! I remember my dread and fear in the dead of night. I had contrived to convey a note to Mrs. Ross, and she was waiting to receive me, and the next morning—when—when he awoke, I was gone. And oh! my God, one thing I ask," continued the unfortunate young lady, covering her face, "one prayer I make, that I may never see his face again."

"But was that woman really his wife?"

"That is it. That is the horrible doubt and dread which haunts me like a nightmare. He swore on the Bible to me that she was not; and she knelt down and called God to witness that she was. She produced papers, and registers too, and I know not what; yet he declared it was not legal. It was, I think, that she was a Romanist and he a Protestant, and they had only been married in a Catholic chapel by a priest; but I believe she was his wife. I believed it at the time—I believe it now."

"I truly pity you," said Sir Hugh, "truly and really."

"Perhaps I do not deserve much," said Amy Williams, as we must still call her, sorrowfully. "I wronged him too: I know that now—I married him without love."

"You were but like many other girls, I fear, then."

"I had some excuse—yes, I had some excuse; but I will go back, if it will not weary you, to when I was a girl. I want you to understand how I was driven as it were into a marriage which my soul abhorred—yes, even then; but now—, now, when I have seen and known——"

"George Manners," said Sir Hugh, in a low voice; "Miss Williams, I truly pity you."

"You have some reason," said she, weeping; "but most—most that I have wronged the noblest—most generous heart on earth. Oh! Sir Hugh, you cannot judge me more harshly than I have judged myself."

"You love him then?"

She made him no answer, but her whole frame shook with the violence of her emotion.

"I ask you to forgive me," said Sir Hugh; "I have judged you wrongfully—I believe now you really care for George, and he shall never learn your story from me."

"I should tell him, but I cannot—I cannot. I know too well what would be my doom—too well how he would act. Even if it broke his heart, I know he would part with me for ever."

"Then what do you intend to do?"

"What do the weak do, Sir Hugh, always?"

Put off—procrastinate—cling to some vain hope—some deluding shadow—anything, anything, I think, but never to see your cousin more!”

“I can but repeat how much I feel for you; I will gladly be your friend.”

“But George is jealous about you already,” said Miss Williams, turning her tear-stained face towards him with a mournful smile. “He fancies we were lovers once, and he and I have only been reconciled for a very short time.”

“Poor George!”

“Poor George, indeed; what evil fate I wonder drove me to this quiet spot?”

“Our feelings are certainly unaccountable,” said Sir Hugh.

“Yes; if any one had told me that here—here, where I came for shelter and for peace—came, in fact, to hide myself more securely than I thought I could anywhere near my old home, that I would have—for the first time in my life—have felt as I now feel, I would have laughed at them as mad.”

“I think we are all rather mad.”

“I think I was when—when I married Hugh Clayton.”

“You were going to tell me about that.”

“Yes; but you—a man like you, born in a different station of life, will scarcely understand the struggles of such people as we were. I re-

member from my earliest childhood our home troubles. It was always debts—always poverty; always striving to keep up a good appearance to the world; and so it went on—our expenses increasing as my sisters grew up and went into society, and my father's business (he was a solicitor in Westport) by no means doing so. But I need not trouble you with all this; first one thing happened, and then another, and at last poor papa failed, and our old home was broken up. After this we went to live in a shabby lodging in one of the little suburbs of the town, and my two elder sisters began to look out for situations as governesses or companions, and, after some difficulty and delay, succeeded in procuring them; whilst I, whom they considered too young to go into the world, remained with papa and mamma, and as we had still some kind friends left, used to go out occasionally, and in spite of shabby dresses and gloves, contrived, too, sometimes to be very happy.

“One old friend, a Mrs. Pocock, was especially kind to me. She used to buy me dresses and hats, and liked to see me look well; and in an evil hour planned a great treat for me; she offered to take me to a military ball at Fordbury, at which place she had a young relation quartered, who had sent her the invitation.

“I remember what a flutter of girlish delight

and vanity I was in at the prospect; how proud of my new white dress and flowers, and how pleased at all the compliments and attentions which were paid to me during the evening. I remember the very dance for which I was introduced to Captain Clayton; he never scarcely left my side after that, I think, during the whole night, and young Pocock began teasing me about my conquest, as he called it, and I heard Mrs. Pocock inquiring of him as to Captain Clayton's prospects.

" ' Oh, he was a rich fellow, Clayton—a rich fellow, and a good fellow, too,' said the careless boy; and on these idle words my miserable fate I believe turned, for my chaperone invited him before we left the ball-room to visit her at Westport, and fixed a day for him to come and dine with her there.

" He came very often after this. He used to ride or drive over from Fordbury, using his own carriage and horses, sometimes twice or thrice a week, and all this impressed Mrs. Pocock and my mother with the desirability of the marriage. I heard of nothing now but Captain Clayton—how handsome he was, how rich and how generous; and he used, indeed, to shower the most expensive gifts both on Mrs. Pocock and myself; but though he sometimes attempted very ardent love-making, he never, for some time at least, made any

regular proposal, and both my mother and Mrs. Pocock began to grow uneasy about this. I did not then understand her motive, but presently Mrs. Pocock began to encourage her nephew Fred Pocock to come also frequently to Westport, and in a very short time Captain Clayton grew furiously jealous of this young boy. It was only, however, a little scheme on Mrs. Pocock's part. She had no idea of having a penniless girl for her niece, or of allowing things to go so far as young Pocock now wished; but it had the effect she desired, and one day—one day when I was dining there, for Captain Clayton had never yet been at our poor home—he asked me to marry him; and I, half frightened at his excitement, scarcely knowing what I said, or what I did not, found myself half an hour afterwards being congratulated by Mrs. Pocock on my engagement, and heard them to my consternation begin to discuss together the prospect of my immediate marriage."

"He had joined the 3rd, then?" asked Sir Hugh.

"Oh yes; he had been in India some time with the regiment before this, but was with the *depôt* when I first met him; but no sooner were we engaged, than he began to talk of returning to India, though both my family and my friends were

astonished and annoyed at this, as there was no motive of economy to be considered, for from the first it had been understood that Captain Clayton was a rich man, and, as far as money was concerned, he certainly was a generous one. But still he was determined to go, and my family were too proud of their fine prize, and too fearful of losing him, to make any real objections. 'I shall have you all to myself there,' was the explanation he gave me; and with a shrinking dread, which perhaps you cannot understand, I saw the preparations for my hateful marriage progress;" and here Miss Williams paused, as if completely overcome by her painful recollections.

"Don't tell me any more for a little while," said Sir Hugh, kindly. "Let us take a turn by the sea; you don't look quite strong enough, it strikes me, just now to go on with this long story."

"I am, indeed, tired," she answered, with a weary sigh, "but I wish you to know——"

"All in good time. Suppose we walk as far as the old boat there, and then when we come back you can go on?"

"Very well," said Miss Williams; and almost in silence the two commenced walking slowly together along the sands, Sir Hugh whistling and drawing patterns on it with his stick as he went.



CHAPTER II.

SIR HUGH'S ADVICE.

DID you see George on Friday?" asked Sir Hugh, after they had reached the spot which he had indicated as the length of their walk, and had begun retracing their steps.

"Yes, he came in when I was ill. I scarcely know what I said to him though, for I had been so dreadfully shocked by a poor fisher-girl's death."

"What fisher-girl?"

"Little Katie, old Alsie's grand-daughter—the old woman who used to go to the Hall when your—when Lady Manners was alive."

"You go about among these people sometimes, don't you?" said Sir Hugh, after a moment's pause. "I want you to—well, I mean, if there is any distress, would you mind asking me to give you some help sometimes?"

"No, indeed, I shall be very glad. It is very good of you to think of it, Sir Hugh."

"Not it! I'm not good, Miss Williams, but

I've a kind of interest in some of them. Do you know many of them?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Do you know the Richardsons?"

"Yes," answered Miss Williams, with some hesitation.

"Because I believe that old fellow—that old Richardson, is a perfect martyr to rheumatism; so would you mind giving him a few pounds occasionally? I know his daughter Pretty Peggy, as they call her here, but she's such a deuced proud little creature she wont even look at one's money—so," and Sir Hugh turned away his head, "it would have to be understood, you know, that it wasn't mine, but your own money."

Miss Williams was silent.

"Perhaps you don't like to do it?" said Sir Hugh, looking round at her; "if so, of course——"

"Sir Hugh," began Miss Williams, nervously, and then she paused. "Sir Hugh," she added, after a moment's hesitation, "will you forgive me if I speak to you as a friend—speak to you as a woman who has suffered much?"

"Perhaps it's best not, Miss Williams," answered Sir Hugh, uneasily.

"People have mixed your name with this poor girl's," continued Miss Williams, earnestly. "Oh!

Sir Hugh, think twice before—before you break her heart."

"Really, Miss Williams?"

"I have no right to speak in such a subject. I know, but I asked you to meet me here because I was going to throw myself in your way as a man, as a gentleman—and this might perhaps break down some of the barriers between us."

"It is no good to talk of it," he answered quickly. "Here we are back at the old story. Will you tell me the end of your story?"

"Yes," said Miss Williams, and she smiled, and then resumed her former seat on the rock while Sir Hugh, after walking forward a few paces, turned and came and stood by her side.

"Well," said he, addressing her, "are you ready to go on?"

"Where was I?" she asked.

"Just before your marriage."

"Yes. I was telling you about the determination to go to India, and the surprise and annoyance of my family that he should have fixed it in so; but one thing struck and astonished me even more, which was that he never spoke of introducing me to any of his people, though certainly in point of family, I was fully his equal; his father having entirely made his own fortune as a successful

merchant in Liverpool. Yet, when I hinted something of this, he told me I must not expect it. 'They would never hear of me marrying a girl without money,' he said; 'so we must just wait till we are fairly off before we tell them, and thus get out of the way of all the fuss and the row; but,' he added, 'I am quite independent of them, and am my own master.'

"Well, time went on, and every day brought me nearer to my marriage, from which I shrank, when among my own family, with undisguised loathing and disgust. But they would never hear me. My eldest sister came home at this time, and anxiously urged on the preparations, and also gave me to understand that she would gladly accompany me to India. But when I eagerly seized on this idea, and asked Captain Clayton to take her, he gave me a very decided negative. 'He would have no one but myself,' he said, and I remember shuddering at the prospect of his constant companionship; for in spite of a species of beauty—in spite of his generous gifts and passionate love, I could not endure his presence, and shrank from being alone with him, as from some hateful evil.

"But the day came at last, and we were married—were married quietly in the parish church at Westport, and a week afterwards we started on our journey to India."

"And your people were there all right at the ceremony, I suppose?" asked Sir Hugh.

"Yes, my father gave me away, and my mother and sisters, and Mrs. Pocock, were also present. We had breakfast at Mrs. Pocock's house afterwards; and then he and I went to London."

"Then," said Sir Hugh, "you may take my word for it, Miss Williams, or rather Mrs. Clayton, *you were married*. From what I know of Clayton, he is too selfish a fellow to put his neck into such a noose as that. It would have been bigamy, do you see? I bet a hundred pounds the other was the false marriage, and that he deceived that woman. She was not a lady, I believe?"

"No, she was an Irish girl he had met in Scotland somewhere, and she was in service there; but they were married—so at least she said, in Ireland, and then he forsook her. That was her story, and I believed it. Sir Hugh Manners, I was thankful to believe it. I am thankful to believe it now."

"He was such a brute?"

"From the first he was possessed by the most mad and furious jealousy. He was jealous of the waiters at hotels; of his soldier servants; of in fact every living creature who came near me. He used to make me wear a thick black veil if I went out, and was for ever suspecting and tormenting me, and I never felt sure that a day would end

without some dreadful scene, and really believed my life to be in constant danger."

"Pleasant!"

"One of his peculiarities also was, he would allow me to make no female friends, and I lived almost a perfectly secluded and isolated life in general; but one day Mrs. Ross, the Colonel's wife, came in during a paroxysm of fury in which he was indulging, and she felt such sympathy for me that she wrote me a note afterwards, offering me any kindness and assistance in her power, and sometimes when he was on duty after this I used privately to see her, and she learnt to like me, and to pity me, and befriended me in the end, when I determined to leave him."

"I wonder you did not do so before."

"I often threatened, but he had one reply—he would shoot me like a dog if I dared to speak of it. I think now, though then I was too young to know, that he felt I had never cared for him, and that if I had been wise enough to disguise my feelings, he would have treated me better and more kindly than he did.

"Well, this miserable life went on for nearly a year. We were at Calcutta for most of the time, but went up the country for some months, and it must have been after our return that you saw me, for we had not been back many weeks when his

first wife, or at least the unhappy woman who claims to be, made her appearance.

"She came to me first when I was alone. She had gone through miserable hardships, and had almost begged her way from England, coming out in one of the steamers, and she was brown, worn, and travel-stained. Poor creature, she had come a long way for what I was praying day and night to escape from. But she loved this bad, cruel man, strange as it may seem, and lying on her bosom was a wasted dying child, whose false father she had come to seek; and when she told me her story, I believed it, and told her at once that I would go.

"She took a letter that night for me to Mrs. Ross, but that lady came and urged me not to give up my position; pointing out in the strongest language how painful and precarious would be the prospect before me. But she had not lived with a husband she hated, and she could not understand that I could literally rejoice at what I said was a righteous opportunity of releasing myself from this hateful tie.

"She then urged me at least to test the truth of the woman's tale; and against my will—but after having made every preparation for my flight, for I had previously sent, under cover of night, all my dresses and jewels to Mrs. Ross's, as I knew they would be almost all that I had to depend on for

subsistence till I could obtain some situation—I called in at her earnest request, when he was sitting at his ease amid his luxurious comforts and wealth, the poor faded creature whom he had flung away from his bosom to starve.”

“What did he say?” asked Sir Hugh.

“I shall never forget that night—never, never. He was sitting, as I said, at his ease, smoking and drinking, when I led her in.

“‘Hugh,’ I said, ‘you know who this is?’ and he started and turned deadly pale when he saw her.

“‘Where have you come from?’ he said at last, in a husky voice, to the poor trembling woman. Then she fell down at his feet, and implored him to do her justice. ‘I’m your wife, you know, Hugh,’ she said; ‘your lawful wife, and this is your lawful child.’ Oh! Sir Hugh, can I tell you what he did then?—he struck her, and spurned her, and called her vile names, and bid her ‘take her bastard away from his sight.’ She started to her feet when he said this.

“‘God will judge between you and me, Hugh Clayton,’ she said. ‘God will judge between you and me, *my husband!*’ Then he made her some kind of offer, that if she would go away, he would provide for her and the child; but she was firm.

“‘Long and far I have come to you,’ she said; ‘come to claim my boy’s just rights, and I’m not to

be put off with a few grudging pounds. I'm sorry for this kind young lady,' she added, with much humility, 'she has fed me and the babe, and been good to us, and she's more fit to be your wife than I; but the Lord will reward her, and she would not stay with you now;—no, I am sure she would not stay with you now.'

"Then he swore a fearful oath that I should stay with him, or that I should die; and so terrified did I become that I pretended at last to yield, giving, however, a look at the unfortunate woman to make her understand my meaning, and in the end he came to some kind of agreement with her that her claims should be properly investigated, and for the night at least she withdrew. After she was gone he called me to him, and with passionate entreaties implored me not to allow her false tale, as he called it, to influence me. He did not deny that she had lived with him, but totally denied the marriage; but on me urging him on my knees to speak the truth, he admitted 'some absurd farce, to satisfy her conscience,' had been gone through in Ireland, and as he said these words I made up my mind, for in her eyes at least I knew this poor wronged creature was his wife.

"I disguised my feelings well—reproaching him, but at last apparently believing, and yielding; and so the storm died away, and night came on and

darkness ; and while he slept—while the man whom I had believed for nearly a year to be my husband lay in his heavy slumber, I stole from his side—stole from his house and his home for ever.”

“ You did right ; yes, by Jove, you did right,” said Sir Hugh, energetically.

“ I had no other course, for I was afraid for my life. Mrs. Ross vainly implored me to expose his cruel conduct, but what good would I have gained ? All I asked of her and the good Colonel was shelter and concealment, and while that miserable man was searching India in vain for me, rushing from one railway to the other, and telegraphing to every station, I lay hidden close to his own door—at his Colonel’s house. When he was away on one of these expeditions, pursuing some imaginary clue as to whither I had fled, I started on my homeward journey, and, disguised as a native woman, reached England safely ; but almost immediately on my arrival heard from Mrs. Ross that Captain Clayton had applied for leave, and that he was also coming to Europe. Then I determined to drop my old life for ever, for I knew if I returned to my own family he would seek me out, so I went to a register office for governesses in London and entered there a false name—the one I now bear—and you know the rest. Mrs. Ross gave me a reference, after solemnly promising never to reveal my existence, and your

cousin Adelaide Manners engaged me—and so I came here.”

“I can only say again,” said Sir Hugh, with much sympathy in his manner, “that I am truly sorry, Mrs.—I beg your pardon—Miss Williams; and if I can be of any service to you in any way, if in fact I can do anything to help you, pray command me; but one thing you have forgotten, you have not told me your real name.”

“It is Barritt—Amy Barritt; if you do not quite believe me,” she added, with a very sad smile, “you must go to Westport and ask after poor papa. He is, I suppose, still living, and he is called Richard Barritt, and was a solicitor, and they used to live in Grove Street West; you can easily find them.”

“Miss Barritt—I shall have to call you Miss Amy, I think, in general, for your three names puzzle me so; but for once I will give you at all events your original one, and tell Miss Barritt that I do believe her, and what is more, I respect and honour her.”

“I deserve no honour,” she answered, turning away her head, “if I had not married as I did, if I had gone to be a governess then, I would not now——” but here she paused.

“I am sorry for George Manners,” said Sir Hugh, gravely.

"Oh! Sir Hugh," and she looked at him, appealingly, "why do you think I have told you my story? Will you despise me very much? Do you know what I am going to ask you?"

"To keep this a secret from him?"

"Yes; I cannot bear to part with him now—to part with him, as I know it would be if he knew—for ever."

"Do you mean to marry him?"

"No, no! I dare not do that. I will never do that. But to see him sometimes, to be friends with him. Oh! do not despise me," she continued; "I am not very strong, it may not be for long; but I want George to care for me a little yet—to care for me to the end."

Sir Hugh now began walking restlessly up and down before her.

"He is poor," she went on piteously, "and we could not be married; that is what I will tell him. It is wrong of me, very wrong, very weak; but—but, Sir Hugh, you will do as I wish?"

"Mrs. Clayton," said Sir Hugh slowly, pausing before her, and addressing her, "for it is right that I should call you by this name, when I say to you what I am going to say—say that though George Manners and I are like brothers; though he is the one man in the world that I have met whom I have never learnt to dislike or despise;

yet no woman, no woman like you at least, shall ever appeal to me in vain, and George shall never learn from me that—I will put it plainly—that the woman he loves is in truth the wife of another man.”

“You are very cruel.”

“I do not mean to be; but I want you to realize for a moment what the feelings of a man like he is will be when he discovers this—for sooner or later he may—for do you know that Captain Clayton is now in England?”

“Are you sure?” and she grew pale, and shuddered as she spoke.

“This far, I met Donovan—you remember him—when I was last in town, and he dined with me at the Club, and we were talking over old days, and he mentioned he had seen Clayton the night before, and he spoke of this very story.”

“What did he say?”

“What could he say? He knew nothing but common report. He said the wife—the first wife, I mean—was living somewhere in London, but that Clayton had assured him she was not his wife; and I for one believe he is speaking the truth.”

“You said nothing about me, I hope?”

“That I had seen you, you mean? Certainly not; but I asked about you—about what was known—you understand—and Donovan said Clay-

ton was a broken-hearted man, and drank hard, and that he sometimes fancies you committed suicide, and sometimes one thing and sometimes another; but that he is terribly altered."

"Poor, poor fellow!"

"He is to be pitied, I think," said Sir Hugh. "He was really fond of you—and, but I will say no more—as long as you wish it I will never breathe a word on the subject; but if—and in my opinion you would act wisely—if you tell George, I am ready of course to confirm every word you have spoken."

"I thank you then, at any rate," and she held out her hand to him. "I am grateful to you—truly grateful, Sir Hugh."

"You must not say that."

"And—and do not despise me very much about George."

"You mean because you love him?"

Miss Williams turned away her head.

"He is a happy fellow, that's all I can say," said Sir Hugh, in his old tone; "I will only envy him."

"Do not talk to me like that."

"Very well; and as for despising you, there's a certain fellow of my acquaintance, Miss Amy—by Jove, that's the best name after all!—a certain fellow, as I was saying, whom I despise as heartily

as any human being on the very same subject sometimes—and his name is—Hugh Manners!”

“You mean about——”

“Never mind who I mean. But do you see we are nearly benighted? What will dear Mrs. Grundy, what will dear Cousin Adelaide say, if she sees us? But take my arm, and I will help you up the hill.”


“No,” said she, gently, “let us say good-bye here;” and so they parted before they crossed the links, and then each went thoughtfully on their separate ways.





CHAPTER III.

PARTED.

 MY WILLIAMS—for it is best for the present to retain her assumed name—rose the next morning with a certain feeling of relief in her mind. For weeks past—ever since she found Sir Hugh Manners knew her secret—she had lived in continual dread lest he should betray his knowledge to his cousin George, whose honourable nature, she knew too well, would consider the fact of her marriage, doubtful though it might be, a bar to separate them for ever.

She had not, however, always intended to deceive him. Again and again, during the earlier period of their acquaintance, and when she had seen George's admiration gradually ripening into love, she had contemplated telling him the truth. But soon her own feelings became too deeply involved for such self-sacrifice, and her mind, untutored in early life to a high standard of honour or morality, shrank from the very idea of separation; and after Sir Hugh, in George's hearing, made his first

allusion to his previous acquaintance with her story, her strongest wish became the hope that, by appealing to his pity and generosity, she could bind him to secrecy, and thus be able to retain George's affection.

She did not, however, even to herself defend her conduct. She knew it was very weak, and very wrong; but she knew also her life was so lonely and unhappy, and that George loved her so dearly, and wild visions of marrying him, and living hidden away with him for ever; wild hopes that perhaps, some day at least, she might be free, began to take possession of her heart, and though she had not admitted this to Sir Hugh, she unconsciously had betrayed it to him, and after he had parted with her it naturally recurred to his mind.

"She means to marry him," said Sir Hugh to himself. "Well, deuce take it, after all George might get a worse wife than a pretty woman who loves him; and besides I've bound myself not to interfere."

Little, however, did Miss Williams or Sir Hugh imagine that this very interview, from which she had hoped and expected so much, had put a final end to all George's uncertainty, and that when she was pleasing herself with delusive hopes of soon meeting him again, he was forming a determined

resolution to break off all connexion with her whatever; convinced that a woman who would carry on a secret correspondence with Hugh Manners was no fit wife for an honest man. Ignorant, however, of this, she rose on the following morning with a lighter and a happier heart, and reproaching herself somewhat for having neglected her duties of late, she went earlier than usual to Mrs. Manners's room, to ask about making some preparations for the children's return, as they were expected home during the day.

She found Mrs. Manners reading a letter, which she hastily thrust into the pocket of her dress as Miss Williams entered, and Miss Williams was struck also with a shade of coldness in her manner, which she had certainly never observed before.

She talked to her, however, about the necessary changes, but looked at her more frequently than usual, and a sort of uneasiness—a discomfort rather—entered at once into Miss Williams's mind. "Could she know anything?" she thought. "Had Sir Hugh played her false after all? But no, it was impossible—it must be fancy;" so she went on with her preparations, and kept wondering if Mrs. Manners's letter was from George.

During the afternoon they all returned. Adelaide did not vouchsafe her even the most distant

salutation, when she ran down to receive them, but swept past her, and went at once up to her own room. The three young girls, however, were as affectionate as usual; and the Vicar, who had been up to the Hall to fetch them, talked to her in his ordinary manner.

The children were a little affected—all of them, but Milly the most so—when they went into the nursery and saw poor Bonny's bed was gone. "Some natural tears they shed, but wiped them soon, the world was all before them;" only in the poor mother's heart the "little one's" place could never be filled again.

"When is Georgie coming?" asked Dolly during their early tea; and Miss Williams noticed that Adelaide Manners's lips curled as her sister asked this question.

"I do not know, my dear," replied Mrs. Manners, gravely; and then she said quickly, as if designing to change the subject of conversation—"And so you liked being at the Hall, Milly?"

"Oh yes, mamma, so much;" answered the little girl, eagerly; "and Cousin Hugh says I'm always to live there when I grow up—he's going to marry me."

"God forbid, my darling," said Mrs. Manners, and she glanced anxiously first at Miss Williams, and then at Adelaide, as she spoke.

"Oh, but, mamma, he's very nice," said Milly.
"Isn't he nice, Dolly?"

"Except when he's dull," answered Dolly, oracularly. "He used to be dull sometimes, but when he wasn't, he was really very nice."

"Milly mustn't leave her mamma," said Mrs. Manners; and then tears rose in her eyes, for she remembered how her other little darling had clung to her at the end.

Milly got up from her seat, and came round and laid her head against her mother's shoulder.

"Don't cry, mamma," she whispered, "I won't leave you."

"Will you come out for a little walk after tea, before the Vicar comes home, dear Mrs. Manners?" said Miss Williams, kindly.

"No, thank you, Miss Williams," she answered; and then in a different tone, she added the next minute, "No, thank you, my dear; for I never can, nothing will ever make me, forget all your kindness to my little Bonny."

Miss Williams looked at her in surprise.

"I—I hope, Mrs. Manners," she said, hesitatingly; and then she paused, and as she did so Adelaide Manners rose abruptly and left the room.

"I do not understand how things are going," said Mrs. Manners, nervously. "I'm sure I thought——"

"What, dear Mrs. Manners?"

"That it was all right between you two—you know who I mean," she continued, nodding at the children; "but things always seem to go contrary."

"I do not understand," said Miss Williams, blushing crimson.

"George is going to write to you—he said he would write to you to-day; you'll get the letter to-morrow; perhaps we'd better not talk about it till we hear what he says," said Mrs. Manners, rising from the table, and beginning to bustle about the room in her old way, thus leaving Miss Williams in a miserable state of doubt and uncertainty.

But she knew the next morning. The letters came at breakfast-time, and the servant having brought several in, the Vicar handed her one from Oldcastle, from George, and with a beating heart she sat through the rest of the meal, scarcely raising her eyes from her cup, and when it was finished, she hurried up to her own room to read it by herself.

It was a long letter—long, at least, for a man—for it covered two note-sheets, but it had no affectionate beginning, no loving address.

"When you receive this," it began, "I will be more than half-way through my preparations for a long journey, and as I have no intention of coming to Narbrough before I set out, I write this to bid

you good-bye. I am not going to reproach you—during a long and sleepless night I have been asking myself if you were very much to blame; if it was very culpable of you to take in the weak fool who trusted you; and I have come to the conclusion, that thrown aside—as I must suppose you have been before you ever would have thought of me—by Hugh Manners, it was not unnatural that, in your dependent position, you should seek some protector, who perhaps you believe would be more faithful than he was. But where you have done wrong, is not to have trusted me. Did you think I loved you so little, Amy, that I could not have forgiven you much—almost anything, if I could have believed you *true*? But you are not. You swore to me there was *nothing* now between you and my cousin. Amy, I blush that I should have to write this to you—I blush for her and for you: but my sister Adelaide opened a letter of yours addressed to Hugh Manners, and it needed no comment of mine. She copied it, and led me where I saw you meet him—the man whom I conclude you love—I, the man you have professed so much to, and deceived! I did not mean to reproach you; and God knows I pity you, for you have trusted one whom I fear will ill repay it—but you must see that but one course is open to me now. *I could not marry a woman,*

loving her however dearly—however madly, without confidence either in her love, or in her honour ; and I could have none—forgive me for saying so—none in yours. Farewell, then—a life-long farewell. I am going to Russia in a few days on some business connected with our house, and it will probably be months before I return ; and before that time you will also, I think, see that it would be advisable for you to find another, and I pray a happier, home ; for both our sakes it is better that we should meet no more. But do not, I entreat you, let this determination of mine induce you to leave Narbrough till you have found something suitable to your wishes ; and do not, oh ! Amy—let these, my last words, have some weight with you at least—do not again listen to the false professions of Hugh Manners, for common report, even in our neighbourhood, must have taught you how little they are worth.

“ G. MANNERS.”

Amy Williams read this letter, and then all grew suddenly dark in her eyes ; the room seemed to whirl round, and the next moment she fell heavily on the floor ; and when Mrs. Manners, alarmed by the noise, hurried to her assistance, she found her lying almost insensible, while in her nerveless hand was the open letter she had just received from her stepson.

Mrs. Manners lifted her up in her arms, and laid her on the bed, and the letter fell at her feet as she did so, and for a moment—she was only a poor, humbly-born woman—the temptation entered into her mind to glance at its contents; but the next she had overcome it, and hastily picking it up she restored it to its envelope, and put it into a drawer before even ringing the bell to procure what was necessary for Miss Williams.

In a few minutes Miss Williams began to revive, and on opening her eyes, and seeing Mrs. Manners bending over her, her first conscious thought apparently was for her letter, as she at once glanced anxiously round.

"Your letter is quite safe, my dear," whispered Mrs. Manners, for one of the servants was now in the room; "I have put it into a drawer," and as Mrs. Manners spoke Miss Williams covered her face with her hand, and turned away her head, to hide the burning tears of shame and wounded affection which, in spite of her efforts to restrain them, now began to pour hot and fast down her face.

She, however, soon regained her self-control, and against Mrs. Manners's earnest advice, insisted on rising and having the children in the schoolroom as usual.

"It will do me good," she said; "it will do me

good ;” and so with a white, miserable face, and trembling lips, she rose and went through her daily duties.

“ It was cruel, too cruel,” she said to herself, as she sat and watched the children at their tasks. “ What, could he neither trust in my honour nor my love ?—he might in my love, for it has cost me very dear.” But he had touched her pride. To fling her off thus without explanation—without even allowing her the chance of clearing herself—this was the love she had thought so warm, so generous, and so true. Ah ! she had not seen George’s white, set face when he penned that cruel letter. She did not know his restless misery, his passionate regret. He had loved her so much, and to find her so small. It was this which bowed his proud spirit to the dust, that Hugh and she should have planned together to take in the soft fool, he thought. That they should have laughed, perhaps, at his honest faith. Oh ! it was very hard to bear. He meant to write a gentle letter to her, for he blamed his cousin far more than the poor weak woman who had deceived him, he told himself ; but somehow, the bitterness of his heart would show itself in his written words ; and when he had finished, it did not seem to him a whit too hard.

“ I must learn to forget her,” he said. “ I must begin my life again, but at thirty this is no easy

task ;” and with a dull, gnawing pain at his heart George went about during the next few days and eagerly watched the postman go his rounds, though he told himself no letter would come from *her*.

None came, but he heard both from his step-mother and Adelaide, and Mrs. Manners’s letter, though it was a most melancholy one, seemed to give some sort of strange comfort to his heart.

“I cannot understand you,” she wrote, “nor your father either, for that matter. It was only the other day I certainly had the very strongest reasons for supposing you and Miss Williams were greatly attached to each other ; yet now you write to say that everything is at an end between you, that you cannot return home till she has left, that you are going to Russia without even coming to say good-bye. Oh ! George,” the good woman continued, “my dear boy, whom I have loved as my own son, do not behave badly, do not behave cruelly to this poor young lady. You don’t know what women suffer in these disappointments, or how they fret and fret—ay, many a one into an early grave. My heart bleeds for this poor girl, who goes about the house with such a white, changed face, and such a listless, weary step, that I am sure her heart is breaking. If you would but come and see her ; and oh ! my dear, the Vicar talks about her leaving, and Adelaide, who went off the day after she came

home to Lilbourne, called yesterday and asked if she was not gone yet. But she has been a daughter to me in my troubles, and she held your dying little sister in her arms, and if she is ever so bad—and I don't believe a word of what they say—I will never ask her to go.

“Your affectionate Stepmother,

“NELLY MANNERS.”

George certainly felt less unhappy after he had received this letter. It was a kind of balm to his open wound. It softened the pain somehow to think that he was regretted, for Sir Hugh was still near to console her. “Hugh goes to the Vicarage, I am told,” Adelaide wrote, “and absolutely spoke to me the other day in the highest terms of praise and admiration of *that woman*. I scarcely knew how to answer him,” his sister went on, “but I looked at him, and he looked back and laughed, ‘What a bugbear you and George have created about me and this poor creature,’ he said. ‘She tells me you fancy all sorts of nonsense; my dear Adelaide, I really wish you would not be so *tiresome*.’ George, *could* you imagine such wickedness on earth?”

Still he was regretted. She had loved him then, this poor, weak woman; loved him in spite of all. She might, she had of course, loved Hugh first; but when she had put her arms round his neck—

when she had said, "George, I love you," it had not all been false. This was George's consolation. She might be ever so bad, but she had loved him, and he began to hope his stepmother would not cast her from the shelter of her roof, and wrote something of that effect to her before the post went out, and then restless and excited, after despatching his letter, he went to one of the theatres, and sat gazing abstractedly on the stage.

"Ah! Mr. Manners," said a voice from behind him, after he had remained thus for nearly half an hour, with very little idea indeed of what was going on before him. "Ah! come to see our old friend Miss Norman? She wears well—she wears well;" and two fat fingers were held out for him to shake; and, turning round, he saw Mr. Mounsey's grey hair, beak nose, and puffy red face, close to his shoulders.

"The ladies have sent me," continued that gentleman facetiously, after George had shaken hands with him; "you see what it is to be a favourite with the ladies—a handsome young beau, in fact. Well, well, we all have our day. I remember when they called me Beau Mounsey, and my first poor lady said to me at a ball, when I picked up her ribbon, and returned it to her, that there was only one beau she would accept, ha! ha! ha!—a pretty broad hint, wasn't it? So I

said a belle and a beau were well matched. Do you take? Ha! ha! ha! She did, for she took me. Ha! ha! ha!"

"I hope Miss Clayton is well?" said George, repressively.

"Yes, pretty well; there she is, smiling at us. You must come and speak to her. I tell my two ladies that what with the stars to-night in the dress-circle, and the stars on the stage, we poor men scarcely know where to look; there is indeed a brilliant assembly."

"Is there?" said George, absently; and then, after considering how he could decently get rid of Mr. Mounsey, he added, "I only looked in for half an hour."

"Well, you must come and speak to the ladies. Mamma will never forgive me if I don't bring you. We must yield to the ladies, sir," he added; and George, with the best grace he could assume, was obliged to get up and follow him to his wife's box.

Mrs. Mounsey was a few years older than her sister, and was a sharp-faced, rather handsome woman, who had married for a home, but was frequently bored there by the presence of its master.

"Girls must marry," she had said to her sister; "and I don't suppose Mr. Mounsey is a greater fool than many of his neighbours."

She had, however, found him more tiresome than she expected. She had got a good house to live in, a carriage to drive in, and a good table to sit down to; but she grudged giving him a share of these luxuries.

"If he would but hold his tiresome old tongue," said the woman of thirty, impatiently, of her elderly husband; but Mr. Mounsey would not hold his tongue, therefore his wife was considerably bored, and sometimes—not very often though—was cross with her younger and handsomer sister, for whose sake, during their little skirmishes, she used frequently to remark, she had sacrificed herself. But Miss Laura Clayton knew that it was not for her sake that her sister, when on their father's sudden death they had found themselves almost penniless, dependent on the grudging assistance of some rich relations, had accepted Mr. Mounsey. Mrs. Mounsey, in fact, liked Mr. Mounsey's house, she liked his carriage—and she thought she would try to like him. She didn't, however, unfortunately; but he was on too good terms with himself, luckily, ever to suspect this. His first wife had been a "peculiar" temper, he often said, and if his second was very disagreeable, he merely thought "mamma was a little peculiar to-day," and was probably satisfied that to be a "little peculiar" was a failing common to ladies in general. They were indeed, as people

go, a very happy couple. Mr. Mounsey had no occasion for jealousy—Mrs. Mounsey no occasion for pinching or economy. What could two reasonable beings desire more?

“I am happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Manners,” she said, after Mr. Mounsey had duly presented George. “Laura has told me that she has met you;” and so she made room for him between herself and her sister, and George found himself, to his great astonishment, five minutes afterwards carrying on a very lively, and certainly interesting conversation, with Miss Laura Clayton.

She was a very handsome woman, yet she scarcely owed this distinction to any great regularity of feature; but her brightly-tinted complexion, her lovely eyes, which sparkled and shone, and changed even in colour with every varying emotion, and her thick, curly brown hair, and finely-developed form, made her undoubtedly, what she was almost universally admitted to be in Oldcastle society, a very pretty woman.

She was not a young girl; being in fact some twenty-eight or nine years of age, and she was clever, charming, and well-read.

“Worth a dozen bread-and-butter misses,” said half the men she met; yet with all the admiration she constantly received, she was as free from vanity as it was almost possible for any human being to be.

"I like attention, of course," she always said in her frank way; "but I can live without it. I expect it when I put on my best dress, and go out for a holiday—but holidays are not for any of us all the days of the week."

They were not for her, at any rate, and had never been. In her early youth she had gone through much trouble, and even now, living amidst ease and plenty in her sister's house, she had still her full share of life's hard rubs.

To begin with, Mrs. Mounsey was not an angel. She was a rich woman now, but she occasionally made her sister feel *she* was a poor one. She gave her a home, and dressed her tolerably; but Mrs. Mounsey's old black silks frequently appeared on Miss Clayton's fine figure, re-turned and re-trimmed by her industrious and clever hands. She had also almost the entire charge and education of Master and Miss Mounsey, aged respectively five and four years; and two more disagreeable, spoilt, plain little children, it was impossible to see.

But through all these small trials this bright, handsome young woman passed unscathed. They did not break her down, or wear her thin, as they might have done a weaker woman. She did not like them, but she had within her something which raised her above them, and made her count them at their proper value; and George Manners, sitting

by her side, began to admit that the society of a very pleasant woman can be endurable, even when under the pressure of a great and heart-wringing care.

"You will come and dine with us some day soon, I hope, Mr. Manners?" said Mrs. Mounsey, towards the close of the entertainment,

"You are very good," answered George, "but I start for Russia in a few days."

"But that need not prevent you dining with us one of the few days left," she replied, smiling; so George had nothing to do but to fix his own day, and to escort the ladies to their carriage.

"I trust your good father, the Vicar, is well?" said Mr. Mounsey, as they were saying good-bye in the lobby; "also your young and distinguished relation, Sir Hugh Manners?"





CHAPTER IV.

LAURA CLAYTON.

TWO days afterwards George found himself in a very bad humour, ringing at the Mounseys' front door-bell, at seven o'clock, attired in evening costume.

He did not want to go when it came to the time. "He was not up to the mark," he said, with a kind of groan, and he certainly felt very much cast down; very weary and tired of it all.

"What a fool a fellow is who can't say no," he had reflected, as he put on his black tie. "Fancy me going to dine with that old bore; though certainly Miss Laura Clayton is a very nice girl."

"The very nice girl" was waiting alone in Mrs. Mounsey's drawing-room, ready to receive him when he arrived there.

"I am afraid you will have a very uncomfortable visit, Mr. Manners," she said in her pleasant voice, holding out her hand to welcome him; "for little Johnnie Mounsey has had an accident this afternoon when I was out. He was

sliding down the banisters, and fell off at the second flight into the hall, and his papa and mamma are very uneasy about him."

"In that case I had much better go home at once," said George. "I am very sorry, but I will only be in the way."

"Oh no, do not talk of such a thing, There is really no occasion for alarm—the doctor says so; but parents, you know," and Miss Clayton smiled.

"It is natural enough, I daresay," answered George, with much originality.

"Yes," said Miss Clayton, still smiling; "what a blessing it is; in them we can re-worship ourselves."

"You think self-worship so strong?"

"I think we all have a little kindly weakness in that direction," replied Miss Clayton, lightly. "The greatest criminal, I believe, has a sort of lurking conviction that he is a fine, manly fellow, or the victim of unfortunate circumstances, perhaps; and for ourselves—I mean we who don't make a public display of our little infirmities—don't we always think privately, now, we are rather nice, or pretty, or clever, or something agreeable?"

"I believe you are right."

"Of course, if I were to say to you, 'What is your true opinion of your own character?' you would not tell me; you could not. Our feelings

are so subtle, so mixed, so incomprehensible, even to ourselves, that it is impossible, I believe, for any human being quite and entirely to pull back the veil which hides the heart."

"We are indeed strange creatures," said George, with a sigh.

"To ourselves, sometimes most strange."

"Can you trust in any one, do you think?" asked George.

"Yes," answered Miss Clayton, and she looked at him with her full, clear, grey eyes as she spoke. "I can trust the man who, outwardly consistent and honourable, may yet hide many of the strange weaknesses by which humanity is beset in his inmost heart, for I know that he will probably have strength to overcome them; and I do not respect a person less, because by some instinct I recognise these failings. Perhaps a 'fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind,' " she added, with a smile on her red lips.

"And could you care for a person for whom you have lost respect?"

"That is a hard, hard question—one which, as I have never honestly tried it, I dare not answer. But I think I should try—yes, I think I should try—to tear away an unworthy affection from my heart."

"It is very difficult."

"Yes," and Miss Clayton looked at George curiously, "but it depends on what you consider unworthy. Perhaps you take a high standard, higher than mine."

"That is not likely."

"I do not know ; at least mine is very different from what it was when I was a very young girl."

"But I am not a very young man."

"No ; but, woman like, I was thinking about women, and I think we often start in life with very mistaken, or perhaps I should say over-drawn, notions. We look for perfection, and are disappointed when we find that others are only really like ourselves."

"My dear Mr. Manners," said Mr. Mounsey, rushing into the room in a terrible fuss at this moment ; "a thousand apologies, but you've heard of our dear little boy's accident ? What a terrible thing it might have been ! I shudder when I think what a terrible thing it might have been !" and Mr. Mounsey shuddered under his dress-coat at his own contemplated misery.

"But I hope he is not very much worse ?" said George.

"Shaken, sadly shaken, that's the worst. No bones broken, I hope. Laura, mamma desired me to say that as she wishes to pay every respect to our young friend, Mr. Manners, that perhaps you

will go upstairs and sit with Johnnie now, and she will come down to dinner."

"Oh pray, Mr. Mounsey, do not disturb Mrs. Mounsey on my account," said George, with eager politeness. "I am sure she will be much happier beside her little boy."

"She wishes to pay you every attention, Mr. Manners," replied Mr. Mounsey, waving his fat hand. "Laura, my dear, you had better go;" and to the great disappointment of Mr. Manners, Miss Clayton went.

She, however, returned in a few minutes. Johnnie had turned restive; Johnnie positively refused to allow his mamma to leave him; Johnnie had begun to cry at the very idea; and so Mrs. Mounsey had sent down her regrets, and her sister, and prayed Mr. Manners would excuse her, which he truly said he would be very happy to do.

"Dinner," announced the servant, and to dinner accordingly they went—Mr. Manners offering his arm, at his host's suggestion, to Miss Clayton, and sitting next her while a very well-cooked and excellent dinner was being served, the cook not having evidently shared the anxiety of her master and mistress on the unfortunate Johnnie's account.

During the dessert, however, Mr. Mounsey, unable apparently any longer to endure his, or perhaps having mamma's "peculiar" temper in just awe,

rose hastily and begged to be excused for a few minutes, and, after selecting the finest fruit on the table as an offering either for the invalid or his wife, hurried upstairs ; and Mr. Manners and Miss Clayton were thus again left alone.

“ When do you start for Russia ?” she asked.

“ At the end of the week most probably, but I am waiting for letters ; you see what slaves we business men are, Miss Clayton.”

“ My papa was also a merchant,” she replied, gravely, “ and I have learnt, I think, to dread the fluctuations of business ; it is so very uncertain. While poor papa was ruined by speculations, Uncle John made a very large fortune.”

“ Where does your uncle live ?”

“ In Liverpool. He has been successful, but poor papa was exactly the reverse.”

“ Some must rise and some must fall ; it’s like everything else, Miss Clayton, and not always the prize falls to the best man either.”

“ To the strong one generally though.”

“ Yes ; but circumstances—a thousand minute circumstances, which hang round a man’s life like a web—contribute much to his success or failure in life. I’ve known very clever fellows unfortunate.”

“ They have wanted some of the elements of success, perhaps.”

“ No doubt ; but there are many elements over

which we have little control. But perseverance, Miss Clayton—you know the golden rule?" he added, with a smile.

"I envy men," she answered.

"Why?"

"Because you have a legitimate sphere of action, one open neither to ridicule nor misapprehension."

"You mean that when ladies take to men's work people are apt to laugh?"

"I mean a woman has either to earn her bread in a dependent or too independent a position. If they throw off what are called social ties, they probably become careless of appearances, and careless in manner; whereas men——"

"Well, what about men, Miss Clayton?"

"They are the more honoured for their toil, whatever it may be. An idle man is a nuisance, universally condemned; an idle woman is—a lady; and only such I believe are generally considered so."

"You should not say that."

"Yet a man is ashamed—yes, in his heart ashamed—to say I have married my sister's governess, or my mother's companion, though probably both are as well-born and as well-bred as himself.

George moved uneasily as Miss Clayton said this.

"Is it not true?" she asked.

"I think," he replied, slowly, "that the man who is ashamed of the woman he loves, however humble may be her position—if she is a good and worthy girl—is a snob."

"Few men would say so," replied Miss Clayton, thoughtfully. "In our own family—at least, in my uncle's family—much misery has been caused by an unequal marriage."

"It is better than an unloving one."

"Yes; but if there is no sympathy of pursuits—no bond except what is called love—will it, do you think, last?"

"It must be founded on something."

"On many things," said Miss Clayton, shaking her handsome head, and laughing lightly. "There are many elements, as you were saying about business, necessary for a successful love affair. First and foremost, I should say, being constantly thrown together."

"Yet a man may be thrown with a hundred women, and not fall in love with one of them."

"Wait till he is long enough and intimately enough. Wait till day by day draws him nearer. I admit, mind, that this is not always the case; there are people who unconsciously captivate us from the first; but half the marriages which take place do not arise from this genuine attraction. There is flattery, another strong element; and vanity,

and—well, why disguise it?—the pomps and vanities of this world.”

“You are speaking of marriages, not love.”

“Half the girls believe themselves in love—yes, half at least, when circumstances are favourable. They marry, and then——”

“Awake.”

“Yes; I know no sadder sight than a young wife finding out she has made a mistake. She gets used to it, but the bloom and freshness of life has passed away for ever.”

“She, however, continues to amuse herself generally.”

“Yes, but how?”

“With those good things which ladies, as you say, are supposed so often to marry for.”

“There you are hard upon women, I think, Mr. Manners.”

“But it is your own theory. You say half the girls marry because circumstances are favourable; that is merely a pretty way of telling the truth. They marry the richest man they can succeed in captivating, therefore they have no right to be disappointed at all—they have got what they bargained for.”

Miss Clayton sighed.

“You do not perhaps realize the position of girls without fortunes,” she said.

"It is hard, I admit ; but, to my mind, marriages for anything but affection are simply disgusting."

"You are very romantic, Mr. Manners."

"I am exactly the reverse, and when you know me better you will find this out ; but I do not call it romantic to have some little higher standard of morality and honour than simply to be for sale to the highest bidder."

"No, indeed."

"You see, I speak from a poor man's point of view," said George, with a laugh.

"Yes," answered Miss Clayton, briefly ; for her own position had recurred to her mind, and these words of George's were not without influence upon her.

She had, in fact, an admirer—a worthy, honourable man, but certainly not a natural object of affection for a lovely, blooming young woman like herself. Yet many and many a time had she mentally discussed the propriety of marrying Mr. Richard Peel, and exchanging the dependent position she held in her sister's house for the assured and comfortable one which he could offer her.

Mr. Peel was a rich man, richer than Mr. Mounsey ; richer, in fact, than any man of her acquaintance. He had risen to the distinction of having purchased a valuable estate in the neigh-

hourhood of Oldeastle, and had built himself a highly-ornamental villa on his new property, and had taken to feed fat cattle, and had also fattened himself in an extraordinary manner, during the last few years of his life. But he was a very worthy man—that is, he was honest, upright, a little bit pompous, perhaps; but the man was human, and had originally been of humble estate, and he was now *very rich*.

He had been married, but his wife had been dead a few years, and he had no children; so now in his sixty-fifth year—a hale, fresh-coloured, white-haired, stout old gentleman—he had begun to think of the “ladies,” as he called them, for the second time in his life, and was absolutely on the look-out for a wife.

Mr. Mounsey was his solicitor, and had the highest respect for “my friend, Mr. Peel.” He knew how much that colliery brought him in annually, and how much this; he knew of shares, investments, of houses, and of lands; knew, in fact, that Mr. Peel lived up to about a quarter of his large income, and he was therefore in favour of his pretensions to his handsome sister-in-law, and had indeed first put Miss Laura Clayton into the rich man’s head.

So sitting there, talking to George Manners, she remembered Mr. Peel and sighed. She remembered

that he had been the highest bidder, and that she had thought of him for that very reason.

"Yet I call myself a good woman," she added, mentally; and as she looked on George's handsome, noble face, she began to think there was something better worth living for, perhaps, than to be "clothed in purple and fine linen, and to fare sumptuously every day."

"Johnnie is asleep, Laura," said Mr. Mounsey, re-entering the dining-room on his tiptoes, and speaking in a mysterious whisper; "so we must not make the least noise, and mamma, I hope, will be able to see our young friend here in the drawing-room presently. You will excuse me leaving you, I am sure, Mr. Manners; but a father's feelings, you see——"

"Yes," said George, laughing.

"Have you looked round my little collection of pictures yet?" said Mr. Mounsey, waving his dinner-napkin. "I have some little bits which have been—ha! ha! ha! *dear* little bits to me. It's an expensive taste, Mr. Manners—very; but it repays one, I think—elevating. Now just look at *that*; in this light, sir, in this light—there is a lovely bit of colour."

So all round the room George had to go, to look at this favourite or that, and when they returned to the table Miss Clayton was gone.

"Will you take any more wine?" said Mr. Mounsey, feebly; and on George answering in the negative—for apparently Mr. Mounsey did not think good wine an "elevating" investment, like pictures—he added, "then we'll join the ladies, sir, we'll join the ladies."

It was a nice drawing-room; well furnished, and with good taste, and Mr. Mounsey acted showman to all the pretty knick-knacks there, just as he had done to the pictures downstairs.

"Have you seen this little thing? Pretty invention, is it not? Laura, have you shown our friend, Mr. Manners, the very handsome gift I received from our worthy friend, Mr. Peel? Real Indian, Mr. Manners—yes, a beautiful set—but Mr. Peel has no occasion for economy. You know Mr. Peel of Newforth Hall, of course, Mr. Manners? A very excellent man, Mr. Peel."

"He's a rich old fellow, isn't he?" said George.

"He is a very wealthy gentleman," replied Mr. Mounsey, with dignity, and reddening as he spoke; "and he has not arrived at—well, more than middle age."

George laughed carelessly. "Do you sing, Miss Clayton?" he said.

"Yes, a little—like I do everything else," she answered, with a smile, and sat down to the piano at once, and sung in a clear, charming voice the

first part of a popular ballad ; but before she was half through it the door of the room opened and "mamma" entered, and everything else was immediately put an end to.

"How have you left our dear little boy?" said Mr. Mounsey, relapsing into a whisper at once.

"I am astonished, Laura, you would think of singing," said Mrs. Mounsey, severely. "I heard you upstairs at once. Just fancy, if you had wakened Johnnie, when I have had such trouble to put him to sleep."

"Oh, I am very sorry," said Miss Clayton, rising at once and leaving the piano; "but I forgot Johnnie!"

"If you had sat holding him for four hours as I have done, I do not think you would have forgotten—but some people never think of others."

"It was very thoughtless of Laura, certainly," said Mr. Mounsey.

"I would have said unfeeling," replied mamma.

"I am the culprit," said George Manners, "I asked Miss Clayton to sing."

"Your dear little nephew had not been nearly killed, Mr. Manners," said Mrs. Mounsey. "No, I must say I am *astonished* at Laura."

"I am very sorry," again said Miss Clayton.

"Oh, well, in this world one must expect selfishness—but, Mr. Manners, I must apologize to

you. I tried to leave Johnnie, but he would not let me go—he knows who is his best friend, poor child.”

“Yes, yes, of course, mamma,” said Mr. Mounsey; “and now suppose we have some tea?”

At tea Mrs. Mounsey’s “little temper” disappeared, and she became very agreeable, and afterwards proposed that they should play whist.

“Mamma and I must be partners, of course,” said Mr. Mounsey, as he cut the cards. “We must not part husband and wife, you know, Mr. Manners.”

“Do not be tiresome, Mr. Mounsey,” said Mrs. Mounsey; nevertheless she condescended to be her husband’s partner, for he was an excellent player, and they quite understood each other’s game; and George Manners and Miss Clayton rose up at the end of two rubbers, each minus ten shillings.

“No matter, my dear, no matter,” said Mrs. Mounsey, with fine delicacy, as her sister opened her slender purse, and began counting out her ten shillings. “It won’t be much into my pocket for you to pay me, since I shall have to give you it back again.”

“Shall I pay you, Mrs. Mounsey?” said George, feeling much concern for the burning blush which spread over Miss Clayton’s fine skin, as her sister made this little allusion to her dependent position.

"Thank you, Mr. Manners, perhaps that will be best," replied the lady; but Mr. Mounsey's countenance fell, as he saw himself thus deprived of his legitimate gain, and his eyes followed covetously the half-sovereign which Mr. Manners handed across the table.

"Ring for the wine, Laura," said Mrs. Mounsey, and on this hint Mr. Manners rose, and bid farewell to his entertainers.

"I hope when you return from Russia we frequently may have the——ah! pleasure of seeing you," said Mr. Mounsey. "Mamma, I am sure you hope so also?"

"Yes; I shall have much pleasure in seeing Mr. Manners, Mr. Mounsey."

"And—ah—what is it now? Caviare—I'm fond of caviare. If you should see any good, Mr. Manners, would you mind bringing over a jar?"

"Very well," answered George.

"I'm fond of it—a good relish—a good relish; I like a relish—and what's a dinner if one has no relish? Do you take? Ha! ha! ha!—not bad."

"Mr. Mounsey, you will wake Johnny," said Mrs. Mounsey, repressively; for Mr. Mounsey was laughing very loudly over his own joke.

"To be sure—dear little boy—thank you, mamma, for reminding me; I forgot for a moment

our little invalid ; but you wont forget the caviare, Mr. Manners ?”

“ No—and have you no commission for me in the far North, Miss Clayton ?” said George, holding out his hand to say good-bye.

“ No—I think not,” answered Miss Clayton, “ but I trust you will enjoy your visit, and return safely.”

“ I thank you very much,” said George, heartily ; and as he walked home through the streets he thought of Miss Laura Clayton with great admiration.

“ She is a charming woman,” he thought, “ a charming woman, and very handsome ;” and he felt all the better for her society. Her cheerful good-nature, under annoyances which, even as a stranger, he could not but see ; and her kind, genial disposition, which shone forth in every glance of her bright eyes, made him almost ashamed of his own gloom and discontent.

“ I daresay, poor girl, she has had her troubles too,” reflected George ; “ has them now, by Jove. I would fling a decanter at that old fool’s head a hundred times a day if I were her ; yet how sunny she is, and apparently how happy. She’s a good girl, I daresay—that’s it ; she wouldn’t make a fellow unhappy as I am.”

He met her in the streets two days afterwards,

as he was returning from his office, and stopped to inquire after the fate of Master Johnny.

"Oh, he is much better," said Miss Clayton; "he is downstairs again. And so you have not started yet?"

"No, but I go to-morrow."

"And when will you be back?"

"In a year, perhaps," said George, rather grimly.

"So long as that?" and she gave ever so faint a sigh.

"Shall I find you in Oldcastle when I come back?" said George.

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Miss Clayton; and then her thoughts wandered to Mr. Peel and Newforth Hall. She was wondering if their next meeting would be there.

"Are you going home?" asked George. "If so, I will turn with you, if you will allow me."

"Thanks, I shall be very glad," answered Miss Clayton; and so they walked on together, George wishing to forget perhaps his unfortunate attachment in this new attraction, and Miss Clayton wishing, it may be, that her friend Mr. Peel was young and handsome as he was.

"I wonder if we shall ever meet again?" she said, as they drew near Windsor Street. "A year is a great piece out of one's life, after all; what may not happen before then!"

"But it may not be so long," replied George. "I was speaking rather wildly when I said that; the fact is, Miss Clayton, I don't care to be in England just now."

"Something has annoyed you?"

"Worse than annoyed me. I want to come back not quite such a disagreeable fellow as I am now."

"I noticed the other night when you came in that you did not look very bright."

"I did not want to come," said George, with a sort of laugh; "that's the truth, Miss Clayton. I did not feel up to it; but I enjoyed myself, thanks to you, and I hope we shall meet again some time."

"I hope so; and will you forgive me saying something? I think we often make ourselves very unhappy about those who are not worthy of it."

"Most unworthy. Yes, that's what enrages me with myself. I can't help having feelings which I utterly despise."

"Of regret?"

"Yes, of regret for what, if it were offered to me, I would not take; and if I did take, would make me miserable or mad."

"And yet you miss it?"

"How can a man re-make his life? Suppose he has fixed on one thing—one woman, say, as his ideal of what a woman should be—and he finds she is

not. Yet can he begin it all over again?—have a fresh love, Miss Clayton, while the old one still lies withering up his heart?”

“You have strong feelings.”

“Yes, unfortunately, and I envy those who—but we won’t talk of it,” said George, with an impatient jerk of his head; and then he added, quickly, as if eager to change the conversation, “How do you like Oldcastle, you have never told me?”

“I should not fix on it, I think, if I were making choice of a home.”

“It is dull, it is dark, it is dirty,” said George; “yet I used to grind away here happy enough. I daresay there are many people who think it the jolliest place on earth.”

“You mean because their happiness lies in it?”

“Yes; and they are happy who can say in what it does lie.”

“And can you not?”

“No; for I used to think it would lie in what now it never can; but here we are at Mr. Mounsey’s. Good-bye, Miss Clayton. I trust some time or other we shall meet again.”

“Good-bye,” said Laura; and she held out her hand, and looked at him earnestly. “Good-bye, Mr. Manners; and when you come back, you must leave your care behind you, remember.”

"Yes," said George, with an uneasy laugh; and he once more shook her hand. "Tell Mr. Mounsey I won't forget the caviare," he added; and then he took off his hat, and went on his way; but for a moment Miss Clayton stood on her brother-in-law's steps, and looked after him as he went.

"What a fine face he has," she thought; "and a noble heart, too, or I'm much mistaken. What is he grieving about, I wonder? Ah, she would be a happy woman whom George Manners loved!"

The next day he started on his journey for St. Petersburg, and Miss Clayton went on with her accustomed life, only she grew colder to Mr. Peel; so much colder that that gentleman asked Mr. Mounsey "if unconsciously he had given any offence to his fair sister-in-law?"





CHAPTER V.

“ Oh ! lonely, lonely moorland !
Oh ! barren, barren shore ! ”

MEANWHILE at Narbrough, during the last few days before George Manners left England, the poor governess there was “ sad and grieving sore.” She could not get over the cruel blow which he had given at once to her love and to her pride ; and she used to wander restlessly by the sea, starting at the sight of any unexpected figure appearing in the distance, and in spite of George’s letter cherishing the hope that he would not leave England without seeing her once more.

Her doubts and fears were, however, one morning abruptly put an end to, for on entering the breakfast-room she heard the Vicar reading in his strong, hard voice a letter from his son.

“ ‘ I leave London to-day, and will proceed direct to Paris,’ ” read Mr. Manners. “ Well, Miss Williams,” said he, pausing as his governess came forward ; “ I was just reading a letter from George to my wife here. He’s fairly off at last, it seems ;

and I should not wonder, from what he says, if he should ultimately settle at St. Petersburg, but at all events he will remain some months."

"Yes," answered Miss Williams, feebly; and she sat down to breakfast, and tried in vain to swallow her toast.

"You are losing your appetite, Miss Williams," said the Vicar, glancing at her presently over his newspaper. "I do not think the air of Narbrough can suit you?"

"I am not very well this morning," said Miss Williams; and she rose hastily, and left the table, utterly unable any longer to endure her feelings in public.

She made up her mind that morning, for, till she knew George was actually gone, she had scarcely realized her sentence of banishment. True, there were the cruel words lying in her desk, and no message had come to soften them. "Before I return I hope you will see that it would be advisable for you to find another, and I pray a happier, home." Yes, there were the cruel words—blotted and half-effaced with the tears of shame and grief which had been shed over them—but they had not washed them out. He wished never to see her more; yet had he proved one of the greatest sinners upon earth, this poor woman would have clung to him, but more fondly in his trouble.

But George would make no compromise with his feelings, and with a sudden wrench had flung his love and hope behind him. "I will begin my life over again," he had said; and though the present and future felt alike dark and dreary to him, he did not turn back from his determination, but with a very restless and angry heart had gone away.

Till Amy knew this, unconsciously she had "hoped against hope;" but now there was none, and during the morning she sought out Mrs. Manners, and, in a very faltering and broken voice, told her she must leave Narbrough.

"But why, my dear?" asked that lady. "What is all this mischief about? I cannot understand it."

"George said I had to go," said the poor governess, with a sob. "Yes, Mrs. Manners, though it was very—very cruel."

"But what for?" urged Mrs. Manners. "Tell me the truth. What's come between you and he, who seemed so fond-like?"

"He took some nonsense into his head about Sir Hugh," answered Miss Williams, trying to compose herself. "He fancied we were lovers, I think, and I know not what; but we never were—never—never. You will believe that, wont you? You will tell him that, after I am gone?"

"My dear, I would do anything for either of you; but I don't know which way to turn. What

was it about you writing to Sir Hugh? The Vicar told me about that; and then, dear, you mustn't be angry; but I have heard——"

"What? Will you tell me what?"

"That you meet Sir Hugh on the sands in the dusk. Now, though you've been a daughter to me—though I never can forget your kindness—I wouldn't like my boy's wife that was to be doing that. I don't wonder at George being angry; for, dear, Sir Hugh is a bad man, and God help the poor lass who trusts him."

"Mrs. Manners, I never trusted Sir Hugh—never thought of him in the way you mean! Will you tell George this? In my early life, which was very unhappy, I knew something of Sir Hugh, or rather he knew something of me. No love, mind, Mrs. Manners; you will tell him that—never any love. But he knew something about me, and I met him by appointment to explain some circumstances which he did not understand. I wrote the letter to ask him to meet me, and Miss Manners honourably opened it; but Sir Hugh does not know that yet."

"What, Adelaide open Sir Hugh's letter! It's not possible."

"It is not only possible, but true. She did; and she sent George word, and he came and saw Sir Hugh meet me. It looked as if there was

something between us perhaps ; but there is not—I swear there is not."

"But what circumstances?" said Mrs. Manners, dubiously.

"Unhappy circumstances," replied Miss Williams, turning away her head ; "but George might have trusted me a little more."

"But, my dear, why not tell George these circumstances, whatever they are? He was a fitter person, surely, to talk them over with than Sir Hugh. Don't you see, when a man wants to marry a woman all her concerns ought to be his."

"Some day I may tell him—some day, perhaps, he will pity me a little more—but," she added, with a sigh, "I will not banish him from his home any longer. He said he would not come back when I was here ; so, Mrs. Manners, I must go away."

"I'm very sorry. Oh ! dear, can't this be put right? If you would but only tell me about your life before you came? You needn't be afraid of me, Amy. If you weren't born a lady, or anything like that, neither was I ; but—but—if it's something worse——" and Mrs. Manners stopped. Even her gratitude was not strong enough to wish to bring any possible disgrace on her dear George's life.

What could Miss Williams say? She could not

blame poor Mrs. Manners for her suspicions, and she could not tell her her story.

"I do not wonder that you do not believe me," she said, sadly, "but it is not disgrace. Tell George that, and that I never cared for Sir Hugh."

"Very well," said Mrs. Manners; but her faith was shaken. She did not like secrets, and had never had one in her life. "I will tell him exactly what you say; and whenever you wish to go, I will always speak well of you, for I never can forget how you behaved to my darling;" and Mrs. Manners wiped her blue eyes as she spoke.

"Perhaps I had better go in a month?" said Miss Williams.

"What's the hurry? George will be away four or five at earliest, and it's not so easy to find situations; and there's one thing, dear," added Mrs. Manners, kindly, "you were a daughter to me in my trouble, and if ever you are out of a place—if ever you want a home—come back to mine as long as I've a roof to cover me. And I'm sure the Vicar will be glad to see you, too. He was as fond of you as could be, till Adelaide put in her bad word; not that I should say that perhaps of his daughter, but she's as jealous as can be of Sir Hugh; but if all tales be true, she'd better look after her fine gentleman."

"I think he really likes that pretty Peggy Richardson, Mrs. Manners," said Miss Williams.

"He should, that's all I've got to say," replied Mrs. Manners. "But this has been a bad morning's work—this talk about you going, and you looking so ill. You're not fit, I am sure, to go seeking places, and among stranger-folk too. Just stay a month or two longer, and then it will be quite time to talk of it."

"No, I must go. I will write to-day to London; but I will never, never forget you," and Miss Williams went and fairly flung her arms round Mrs. Manners's neck. "I'm not angry you should suspect me. I know I have been forced to act as if I had something disgraceful to hide, but I have not. It is no disgrace of mine—and I did not wish to marry George—that is, I would not have married him. I loved him too well for that; I would not have brought trouble on his dear life, and he might have trusted me;" and she laid her head on his mother's neck and wept aloud.

"I do, at any rate," said Mrs. Manners, quite overcome. "Some trouble you've had, poor lass; your father maybe, and that bad-hearted fellow, Sir Hugh, knows it, and has led you into this scrape; the Lord forgive him for his evil deeds!"

"No, no," and Amy raised her head from that kindly breast; "no, dear Mrs. Manners. Sir Hugh

is not to blame. He has been very kind, and he is not all bad, I am sure. He wanted me to tell George, but I would not—I could not.”

“All will be known some day, my dear,” said Mrs. Manners, solemnly.

“Yes, and I am glad—glad that George will know me better when I am dead.”

“Then your heart is true,” said Mrs. Manners, in a relieved tone ; “it’s only the deceitful who need fear the day when all shall be revealed.”

“I have not done what was right,” said Amy, humbly ; “but it was out of my foolish love to him—my foolish love, that was all ; I would not have wronged him for the world.”

“Nor he you, I am sure of that,” answered Mrs. Manners. “But come, my dear, lie down on the bed for a little while, for you look so white, and you are shaking all over, and I’ll send the children into the garden to have a run till you feel better ; poor darlings, whatever will they say when they hear they are going to lose you ?”

“Perhaps I’ll come back some day,” said Amy, with a very faint smile ; “but for the present, I must go ; you see that, dear Mrs. Manners ;” and so it was fixed, and in the afternoon she wrote to her old friend, the manager of the register-office in **Barners** Street, and so began her second search after a new home.

In the evening of the same day, just after their early tea, Mrs. Manners came into the schoolroom, and proposed they should all go out for a walk. She spoke with peculiar kindness to Miss Williams, but she said nothing further to her about remaining at Narbrough ; indeed, she had received positive instructions from her husband not to do so.

"It's the very best thing that can happen," said Mr. Manners, on his wife telling him, almost with tears in her eyes, that dear Miss Williams was going away. "The very best thing," repeated the Vicar, emphatically. "After all, it was a miserable connexion for George ; and as for Hugh, he'll forget her as soon as her back's turned ; so she's best out of the way."

"I'll not forget what she did for me, though," replied Mrs. Manners, with some spirit.

"All right, my dear," said the Vicar. "Cherish your gratitude by all means—but at a distance. Both your son and your nephew are very well quit of this young woman ; so don't you be asking her to stay ;" and the Vicar took up his pen, though he had no present intention of writing, as a hint to his wife that she might as well leave him alone.

"I don't like doing it," said Mrs. Manners, as she left the room ; but she was too good a wife to think of disobeying her husband, and therefore said nothing more to Miss Williams about staying ; but

she was very affectionate in her manner, and urged her to take the children out, as she thought the air would do her good.

"I have a letter to post," said Miss Williams, wearily, "so we can go to the village;" and accordingly they all started a quarter of an hour later—Milly hanging fondly on her governess's arm as they went.

They posted the letter, and on their way home encountered Sir Hugh, who was riding, and whom they had not seen for several days, and the children at once ran forward to meet him.

"How are you, Hugh?" cried Dolly; "we heard you had been in Scotland for a week."

"For three days, Miss Dolly, to be exact," answered her cousin, touching his hat to the party. "And how are you, Miss Williams? and my beauty there?" and Sir Hugh slightly tapped Milly's hat with his whip as he spoke.

"I'm quite well, Hugh," answered Milly, lifting up her beautiful, innocent face.

"That's the kind of little lass, Miss Amy," and Sir Hugh gave a smile and a nod as he pronounced the name, "to win my heart. If she had been ten years older I would have asked her to marry me."

"I've often heard you say you would do it as it is, Hugh," said Dolly; "but I suppose it's only your chaff."

"Yes, Miss Pert, it's my chaff—but I wouldn't have you, Dolly—no, not for all the world."

"Well, I wouldn't have you."

"Wait till you're asked, my dear," laughed Sir Hugh.

"Wait till you are asked," retorted Dolly, with some temper.

"Dolly, that is rude," said Miss Williams.

"Well, he's rude, he's always chaffing."

"But he means nothing."

"Perhaps not," said Dolly, modified, and beginning to plait the mane of Sir Hugh's horse.

"Henrico knows you, Dolly," said Sir Hugh, as the beautiful creature he rode whinnied and arched its neck in recognition.

"Henrico and I are great friends," said Dolly.

"I haven't forgotten all the friends I made at the Hall so soon, Cousin Hugh."

"How is it you always talk, Dolly, and not Katie?" said Sir Hugh, to tease her. "Katie, why do you let this chatterbox always shut you up?"

"She will talk," said Katie, shyly.

"Katie's getting to the age to study appearances, Miss Williams. She's beginning to think of the becoming; now this little imp——"

"Don't call names, Hugh," cried Dolly.

"This little imp doesn't mind being rude or dis-

agreeable," went on Sir Hugh, quite coolly. "She isn't thinking of making conquests yet."

"Oh, Hugh," said Katie, blushing crimson.

"Is it the doctor's boy, my dear," said Sir Hugh, "whose peace of mind you are thinking of disturbing? I saw a red-haired youth the other day at the Hall, when one of the maids had the toothache. Is he to be your first victim?"

"His hair isn't red," said Katie, overwhelmed with blushes.

"By Jove! look to your pupil, Miss Williams. It's the old, old story, I declare. When was *your* first love affair? Mine was, let me see—oh yes, Jack Kailston's sister. He's the butcher in the village now, and I adored Miss Kailston when I was about ten, and she about eight-and-twenty, I suppose. She espoused soon afterwards a butcher in Oldcastle, and she was an uncommonly fine woman, I remember. I wonder if I would know her now?"

"I should think not."

"Yet it was first love—first love, which Byron tells us is 'sweeter still than this, than these, than all,' &c. Is that a correct quotation? I wonder who *his* was. Not Miss Chaworth, we may be sure. That was the first which looked well in rhyme, so he told us about it; but a fellow like that would have a dozen before."

"Need we edify Miss Katie with all this?" said Miss Williams.

"Better not, perhaps—and yet why? Miss Katie in a few years will go upon a stage, where one by one all our little illusions are rubbed away."

"Don't say that—there are some happy women surely, who never go behind those dreary side-scenes—some lives always sheltered and secure. Let us hope for Katie, at any rate, that she may never know the bitter evil of the world."

"Wish her an early death, then," said Sir Hugh, "otherwise your hope is vain."

"What, all? Are there no happy lives, then?"

"I won't say that—but the knowledge of evil must come; and who can say a life is happy till its close?"

"I think you are the chatterbox now, Hugh," said Dolly, who was getting very tired of a conversation in which she took no part.

"I am, child, I admit it; and now you three run on a minute or two: I have a secret to tell Miss Williams—which is," he added, as the girls obeyed him—"what is this about George?"

"You mean about him leaving England?"

"Yes; I had a letter from Adelaide this morning, and she told me George had started, or was about to start, for St. Petersburg, as he was better

out of the way just now. Of course you understand I am quoting her words."

"It means, Sir Hugh—it means that your cousin, Miss Adelaide Manners, who prides herself on being a very fine lady, I believe, yet condescended to open the letter I wrote to you to ask you to meet me, and conveyed its contents to George, who naturally, perhaps, mistook its meaning; and it means also," she continued; but Sir Hugh interrupted her—

"What do you say?" he said; "Adelaide Manners open my letters!"

"Yes; and sent for George, who saw us meet, and——"

"Concluded all manner of evil, of course. But are you sure about the letter?"

"I am sure; George wrote to bid me good-bye—a long good-bye," she added, with some agitation; "and he told me he blushed for his sister."

"He well might, by Jove! and these are the *ladies*, as you say, of our world? Why, many a poor, untaught girl would not have stained her hands with such an action."

"I hope not, at any rate."

"And George saw us meet, did he? And made a devil of a row, of course?"

"No; but he said he would never willingly see

me again, and that he would not come home as long as I was here—and I am going away——”

“What, from Narbrough! Nonsense; all about that meeting? I’ll soon make it right with old George.”

“He will not believe you, I think. Miss Manners has utterly poisoned his mind.”

“I’ll soon stop her little game! What, open a fellow’s letters when you were staying in his house?—why, I’d as soon suspect you of pocketing my beloved aunt’s best silver spoons down at the Vicarage.”

“Your beloved aunt, as you call her, would not have done it.”

“I daresay—yet the Vicar married her out of the kitchen. By Jove! it’s a snub to one’s honour to think any of the family would be so low—and no cause for it either, that I can make out.”

“She is jealous of you, Sir Hugh.”

“She is a little fool for her pains then; ay, I shouldn’t wonder if Miss Adelaide has fixed her affections on being mistress of her old home—but she wont, if that is any consolation to her.”

“Perhaps it is not ambition only.”

“What, you mean she is in love with me? Not she—not she. She’s in love I daresay with the old place, and my mother’s old diamonds; I am sick of all this, do you know,” he continued,

abruptly, "of all the shams—the humbug—and the lies among which we live. I'll astonish them some day, it strikes me. It would make a sensation, wouldn't it, if a worldling like me were false to his creed?"

"Yes; but I should be glad."

"Ah, but I haven't been—don't flatter yourself, my dear young lady, that you have made a convert to the ways of godliness, or virtue, or any other good thing. I'm only sick of the devil and all his works; and, by Jove, fashionable young women now-a-days are, I think, among his most promising pupils."

"Do you mean to tell Miss Manners about the letter?" asked Miss Williams, by way of changing the conversation.

"Do I mean to tell her?" I should think I did," answered Sir Hugh, with considerable energy. "It's too late this afternoon," he continued, looking at his watch; "but to-morrow I'll ride over and give Lady Lilbourne warning that she had better open the post-bag first as long as she has Miss Adelaide for a visitor."

"No, no; you must not say that!"

"Don't you beg forbearance for her," said Sir Hugh; "she would ask none for you. She hated you from the first—and I don't wonder."

"Yet I never injured her."

"You are better-looking," he answered; "there you have the secret. She would like to tear out your eyes; but to make all this row with old George, and to turn you out of your home, it's too bad—really too bad!"

"Yes," said Miss Williams, and she sighed.

"But you needn't go. I'll soon stop Miss Adelaide's tongue on the subject, and George will get over his huff. Shall I write to him?"

"What would you say?"

"That our intimacy entirely arose from my previous acquaintance with you, and that neither before nor since—for you wouldn't let me, you know—has there been any love-making between us."

"It might perhaps do some good. But what will the children think all this time?"

"Hang it, what matter!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, impatiently. "What's his address? Oh! to be sure, you won't know. Well, I'll send the letter to his office in Oldcastle—they'll be sure to forward it; and I'll let you know when I hear from him. But I'll see you before that, of course. I'll come down to the Vicarage."

"You had better not!"

"Nonsense! But good-bye for the present, since you are in such a hurry to be off. I'll come down as soon as I've seen Adelaide," added Sir

Hugh; and then, after touching his hat, he rode away.

He had not, however, gone many paces when he saw "Pretty Peggy," who had seen him talking to Miss Williams and his cousins, and had loitered on the road for the purpose of meeting him, and who was sitting by the wayside as he came up, looking so handsome and so picturesque, that Sir Hugh gazed at her with undisguised admiration.

"Well, my bonny Peggy!" he said, pulling up his horse; "and where may you be going to?"

"I am going home," she answered. "I've been my rounds, and I'm that weary."

"Silly girl! What, you've been selling your fish, have you?" and he broke out into a loud laugh. "A nice employment, Peggy, for my Lady Manners—that is to be."

"Ay, that is to be!" said the girl, indignantly; "but it's a long time in coming."

"All in good time, child."

Peggy looked at him wistfully; and then sighed deeply, and turned away her head.

"I have given you all, Hugh," she said, in a low voice. "I've naught else."

"Am I complaining, you silly child? Don't be a little goose. It was rude of me to say that about selling your fish; but I didn't mean to hurt you. By Jove, I honour your honest pride."

But Peggy only sighed again, and her head dropped upon her breast.

“What’s vexing you, Peggy?”

“Are you tired of me, Hugh?” she answered, with much pathos. “I’ve been watching you for a long time talking to the governess lady at the Vicarage—maybe you like her better now?”

“Maybe I don’t, though,” said Sir Hugh, imitating her.

“Don’t, don’t!” she cried, passionately; “don’t jest—it’s no jest to me!”

“Well, I won’t.”

“You will always love me a little, won’t you?” she continued, looking up into his face; “always, dear Hugh?”

“I believe I shall; but, Peggy, who can answer for his own heart?”

“I think I can,” said the girl, humbly; “but then I’ve naught to give.”

“You have what I prize at any rate—an honest, tender little soul. But when are you coming to meet me again, Peggy?” And then looking round to see that no one was observing them, Sir Hugh made his horse advance a step closer to her, and stooping down kissed her lovely brown cheek.

“Ah! Hugh,” and for a moment she rested her beautiful head against his breast; “ah! Hugh, if your love was like mine.”

"It would be perfect, no doubt; but don't look so downcast, child. It mayn't be like yours, but, for all that, it's a good, honest kind of love in its way."

"And—and—we shall be married soon?"

"Yes."

"Well, I trust you—you wont deceive me, will you?"

"No, no; and don't take any nonsense into your pretty little head, and vex yourself about Miss Williams. Must I tell you a secret about her, child?"

"Yes."

"She's desperately in love, is that the term?—is that romantic enough for Miss Margaret Richardson?—with my cousin George; only you mustn't tell."

"He's a fine fellow, George."

"Indeed, Miss Peggy!"

"Yes, Hugh—a fine, noble fellow. All speak good o' him."

"And ill of me, I suppose?"

"No, no; but Mr. George has been more among the country-folk about. They ken him better than they ken you."

"Don't say *ken*, Peggy."

"Oh, I forgot; I don't speak quite so bad as I did, though, do I, darling?"

"No, you are getting quite a south-country accent—a dulcet tone, Peggy," said Sir Hugh, with a laugh.

"Ah, don't laugh at me."

"It's only fun, you know, child."

"Yes, I know; but still I don't like it; it makes you seem so——"

"So what?"

"Far away from me. Ah, Hugh, if I'd but been born like you."

"I wouldn't have cared a bit for you, most likely. You would have been a fine heartless lady, like my cousin Adelaide there and her lot, and would have taken your pretty face to the best market."

"That would have been Hugh, then," said she, fondly.

"I don't know that. Suppose now, Peggy, a real live lord were to come and ask you, what would you say?"

"I'd have nought to say to him."

"That's all very fine, but——"

"What a tease you are, Hugh! As if you didn't know."

"Well, I believe I do," said he, looking at her.

"Yes, Peggy, I believe you love me a little."

"A very little bit," said she, smiling, and looking up into his face.

“By Jove! here’s some one coming,” said Sir Hugh, gathering up his reins. “Good-bye, Peggy, don’t forget to-morrow;” and waving his hand to her, he rode on, while the poor girl lifted her creel upon her back, and walked wearily behind.





CHAPTER VI.

"VEXATION OF SPIRIT."

ABOUT three days after this an advertisement in one of the local papers caught Miss Williams's eye:—

"Wanted, in a genteel family, residing in Oldcastle, a governess for two young children, aged five and four years. Apply (stating age, previous experience, present engagement, and what salary would be expected) to Box No. 7, Post Office, Oldcastle."

Miss Williams read this, re-read it, and as she did so a wild hope rushed into her heart. If she could get this situation—if she could go to Oldcastle, she might again see George; if she saw him they might become friends, and this time she would tell him all.

She acted at once on this idea, and without consulting any one, addressed the same night a letter to Box No. 7, Post Office, Oldcastle, complying with the demands of the advertisement; and towards the end of the week an answer came to her application.

"Mrs. Mounsey," she read—after nervously opening the highly-scented and magnificently crested letter and note sheet, which the post had brought her—"Mrs. Mounsey has received Miss Williams's letter, dated March 9th, and she will be glad if Miss Williams will make it convenient to call next Thursday afternoon, at three o'clock, at No. 15, Windsor Street. Mrs. Mounsey is acquainted with one member of the family with whom Miss Williams is at present residing, but that gentleman is at present unfortunately abroad. Nevertheless, Mrs. Mounsey has chosen Miss Williams's from among many other applications, on account of her knowledge of the respectability of the Rev. A. Manners's family; and should the personal interview (which is essential) prove satisfactory, Mrs. Mounsey will at once correspond with Mrs. Manners as to Miss Williams's capabilities. 15, Windsor Street, Oldcastle."

"Will that do, do you think?" said Miss Williams, putting this letter into Mrs. Manners's hand during the evening of the day which she received it.

"Why, they must know George," exclaimed Mrs. Manners, after having read it, and a flush came over her face as she spoke.

"Yes, I suppose so—in business perhaps a little," replied Miss Williams, also blushing crimson.

"And you would like to go there?" said Mrs. Manners, looking at her. "Then you want to see George."

"Yes, I'll not deny it. I do want to see George again. I want him to know the truth."

"The truth is best; but about going to Old-castle—I don't know I'm sure."

"You think I ought not to go?"

"I won't say that—it depends. But perhaps you're right; but I wouldn't tell him, I think, that you are going."

"No; perhaps I may never see him."

"Oh, almost sure you'll be meeting him in the streets someway, if you are really going to leave us."

"I could not stay after what he said."

"Well, maybe it will all come right in the end, and we'll say nothing to the Vicar about these people knowing George. The best of men, you see, are only fractious at times, and it's just as well to keep them quiet."

"Very well."

"And that reminds me, the Vicar told me he had met Sir Hugh yesterday, and he said he was coming down to night; though I'm sure I wish he'd just stay away."

"You don't like Sir Hugh?" said Miss Williams, with a smile.

"No," answered Mrs. Manners, shaking her head, "I don't trust him."

"He is strange, but I do not think he is as heartless as he chooses to appear. But about Mrs. Mounsey's letter. I suppose I may go to Old-castle on Thursday?"

"Of course; why do you ask? And one thing, if you go there, you won't be far off us, not like London, or any of those foreign parts."

"No; I can come to see you sometimes."

"And what about Sir Hugh? Will you tell him if you go? Far better not, and then he can't come to see you, and George would be sure to hear if he did."

"It would be wiser, but he will be sure to ask."

"Just put him off then. What call has he to know all about you? If you mind what George thinks—but there, I declare, there he is, so we must say nothing more."

Sir Hugh had passed the dining-room window while Mrs. Manners was speaking, and the next minute had opened the door and come in.

"Well, ladies," he said, "and how do you find yourselves this cold evening? Mrs. Manners I am going to ask you to give me a cup of tea;" and as Mrs. Manners bustled out of the room to see after complying with this request, he added—"I've had such a row with Adelaide; a tremendous row. I

told her a bit of my mind, and she returned the compliment."

"What did she say?"

"What an enraged jealous woman generally says," replied Sir Hugh, coolly. "She said I was a villain, and a good many other things besides."

"And what about George?"

"She congratulated herself on having saved her only brother from your snares; and—would you believe it?—I was fool enough to get into a rage with her, and informed her that the lady she vilified was every whit as good as George himself—and didn't she storm."

"It is very disagreeable."

"It is rather fun, I think. Yet do you know that girl has irritated me. She used such vile language too; and shall I tell you what I have been thinking?"

"Yes."

"What about that Scotch marriage, or Irish marriage rather—suppose it could be proved to be binding? I mean that there is a first Mrs. Clayton, you understand," added Sir Hugh, with a smile.

"Oh, Sir Hugh, let it rest, let it rest."

"It would be such a sell for Adelaide. By Jove! I feel as if I would like to lower my lady's crest.

Suppose it could be proved ; you might marry, you know."

"And sacrifice poor George? No; I care for him too much for that."

"He wouldn't look on it as a sacrifice, I can tell you. Do you know he's madly in love with you—that cousin of mine?"

"He hasn't proved it at any rate," said Miss Williams, with a strange joy creeping into her heart.

"That's because he thought you were playing him false; but just wait till he knows the truth. I told you I would have told him; don't you remember? He would think it no disgrace, and who would be the wiser?"

"I do not know what to say; I'm afraid of inquiry. Suppose—oh, Sir Hugh! suppose it were not a marriage—and I were once more in that man's power."

"That would be awkward, certainly. Well, shall we wait till George comes home, and then tell him the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

"Yes, that would be best."

"I've written to him. I wrote when I came in warm from my encounter with Miss Adelaide. I think he'll believe me. I used pretty strong language."

"I am very grateful to you," said Miss Williams;

and something in her soft nature prompted her to rise and hold out her hand to Sir Hugh, to express her feelings.

"There, there," he cried, shaking it, "don't say anything more. Don't tempt me to make love to you; which, by Jove, if you look as soft and as pretty as you do now, I'll be beginning at once."

"How can you talk nonsense like that?"

"Sense, my dear, sense. I want to act fairly to George and you in this matter; and besides I'm really sorry—heartily sorry, for a pretty little creature like you, being tossed about the world by a scoundrel's act, as I call Clayton's—when you didn't even love him too—he had not a shadow of an excuse."

"Not even if I had loved him."

"I don't know. Love excuses a great deal, that's my morality."

"Never a cruel action like that."

"What about keeping my brave cousin in the dark all these months, eh? If you had told your little secret to George a while ago, it strikes me you would have left him a happier man. You'll excuse me showing you by a little happy illustration how different is theory to practice."

"It was very wrong."

"Very. Yet I would have forgiven you if it had been me. You see you made a mistake; you

should have fallen in love with me, and not with George."

"With neither, you mean."

"That's absurd; you're too handsome a girl to go moping your life away. Ah, Mrs. Manners," he continued, addressing their hostess, who just then entered the room, "here is a young lady who is giving me some horribly hard lessons in morality to learn; telling me one ought to do right, whatever is the temptation to do wrong; but I tell her, preaching is easier than practice."

"I don't understand such things," said Mrs. Manners, stiffly.

"Nor I; it's this lady who is the would-be little saint. Ah, me!—ah, me!—it's years since I set out on the downward road!"

"I don't like to hear you say it," answered Mrs. Manners, arranging the tea-tray which the maid had brought in.

"But it's truth," said Sir Hugh; "and I've had no hand stretched out to save me all these years. No good woman has loved me, and made a halting-place for me—until now."

He almost whispered the last two words; but Miss Williams heard them, and felt a sort of interest in him as he spoke.

"It is not too late," she said, in a low tone also.

He made no answer, but sighed deeply, and then rose restlessly, and took up a book which was lying open on a distant table.

"Is this what you are reading?" he said, turning to Miss Williams.

It was Thackeray's "English Humorists," and was open at the pathetic sketch of Goldsmith.

"Was there ever such a man as that really, I wonder?" went on Sir Hugh, re-crossing the room with the book in his hand as he spoke—"ever such an innocent, boyish, tender heart? And to last all through those dreary years too—till he was past forty, wasn't it? And to go on believing in human nature all that time, and clever too. By Jove, to me it's a marvel!"

"He was so trustful, that he trusted others, I suppose," said Miss Williams.

"Is that it, d'ye think? Is that the secret? Why, he must have been a child all his life!—a reckless joyous creature to the end. My God! what a thing it is to be able to believe!"

"Do you mean in God?"

"Ay—and His creatures. What mocking devil presided over my birth, I wonder, and took away this wondrous power?"

"But you do not really mean that you can trust in no one, Sir Hugh?"

"In whom can you trust? Your lover?—Bah!

look into the man's heart first, if you can. Your friend's faith?—Hear the kindly little back-sliding whisper on your follies which he will probably indulge in. No; the wife of your bosom, the husband of your love, the child in your arms, are all tainted! 'Put not your trust in princes, or in any child of man.' No truer words than these ever were written."

"Put it in God, Sir Hugh," said Mrs. Manners, with much solemnity. "Trust Him, and you'll learn to trust His creatures. We none of us are perfect; but it's not the bad in us you need be seeking for."

"And do you do this?" answered Sir Hugh, looking at her curiously, for he had never heard Mrs. Manners express any decided opinion before.

"I hope so," she replied, humbly; "though I should not boast, for when—when He took away my darling, I thought it very hard. But maybe He knew I loved her too well. I was wrapped up in the little one, Sir Hugh, and—and I fear my heart rebelled."

"You have others to fill the place," said Sir Hugh, kindly.

"Ay, but *hers* is empty—and—and perhaps she's but the first to go—there's Milly——"

"She looks stronger than she did," said Sir

Hugh. "She is a dear little girl—my pet among them all."

"She is too good for us, I fear," answered Mrs. Manners, with a sigh. "But maybe He will spare her," she added, with humble faith; "she's the child of many prayers."

"Well, good people, how are you getting on?" said the Vicar, opening the door. "Well, Hugh, so you've found your way to the ladies—as usual?"

"The pleasantest company, sir, always," said Sir Hugh, rising and offering his hand to his uncle.

"Hum!—it depends on taste."

"To my taste at any rate," answered Sir Hugh.

"Yes, that is commonly reported," said the Vicar, dryly. "But what very solemn conversation," he added, "did I interrupt as I came in?"

"On things in general," replied Sir Hugh, carelessly; "on want of faith in particular."

"May I ask on what particular branch of faith? Hugh, you should be great on this point, if all tales are true."

"On having it strongly developed, sir, or the want of it?"

"Well, popular opinion would say the latter, I should think."

"Popular opinion is generally false, uncle, as you know well."

"I haven't found it so. Unless a man is very rich, he usually gets a pretty true character."

"By Jove, I've known parsons get a pretty good character who deserve a deuced bad one."

"Hum! Have you been among the Methodists lately, Hugh, as that remark savours strangely of that crew; and they are very strong among the fishing population in the village?"

"They are earnest, at any rate," answered Sir Hugh, reddening.

"Yes, in the work," said the Vicar, with an absurd accent on the words.

"They do the work which the proper parsons don't, perhaps," retorted Sir Hugh.

"Has pretty Peggy Richardson been making a convert of you?" asked the Vicar, pleasantly. "She's a little Methodist, I suppose, and people say you keep her company a good deal."

"People better mind their own business who say so," replied Sir Hugh, with a darkening face.

"Have you been fishing to-day, Mr. Manners?" said Miss Williams, eager to put an end to this disagreeable conversation.

"No, Miss Williams," answered the Vicar. "I've been over to Sir Thomas Lilbourne's. I've been to see my daughter."

"Did Adelaide tell you of our little skirmish, then?" asked Sir Hugh.

"She told me you had been very angry about some letter she had opened by mistake, from Miss Williams here."

"Yes, by mistake!" said Sir Hugh, emphatically. "And did she tell you also that she wilfully deceived George as to its contents, and tried to make out that a slight acquaintance which I had the pleasure of having with—Miss Williams's previous life, was a very improper connexion indeed?"

"What are you driving at, may I ask?" said the Vicar.

"This—that a lady by birth and education has been called hard names by your daughter, because in her early life she had the misfortune to see my unlucky face once, and didn't even remember she had seen it—for which I owe you a grudge," added Sir Hugh, with a smile and a nod at Miss Williams.

"Sir Hugh, had we not better change this conversation?" said Miss Williams, nervously.

"Why? By Jove, you've nothing to be ashamed of."

"Well, as I am leaving Narbrough it's no matter now."

"Miss Williams," said the Vicar, with some feeling in his manner, "no one, I am sure, can regret

more than I do the unfortunate misunderstanding which has arisen between you and my daughter ; but, of course, after what has passed——”

“What has passed?” said Sir Hugh, angrily. “I met this young lady for her to explain certain circumstances connected with her own life, and of no earthly consequence to any one else ; and Miss Adelaide Manners must needs open my letters first, and then follow me on my walks afterwards. It strikes me an apology is due to Miss Williams for all this, and if Adelaide ever means to speak to me again, she shall make one.”

“What do you say to this, Miss Williams?” asked the Vicar.

“It is quite true what Sir Hugh says,” she answered ; “but it is no matter ; I shall leave Narbrough, and then Miss Adelaide will be satisfied.”

“I think my daughter has misunderstood your conduct, and I cannot—and I am sure Mrs. Manners cannot—forget all your attentions to her during her illness.”

“No, indeed,” said Mrs. Manners, eagerly ; “she has a home here open to her always when she likes to come back ; that’s what I tell her—and hasn’t she now, Arthur?”

“I shall always be glad to see Miss Williams,” replied the Vicar, with a certain reserve in his

tone; "and I think it is a great pity——" and here he paused and looked at Sir Hugh.

"What is a pity, sir?" asked his nephew.

"That you should idle away your time about here, Hugh," answered the Vicar; "and if you take my advice I think you would be better employed in town, associating with your equals."

"Walter did that, uncle," said Sir Hugh, with a sort of laugh. "Are you thinking of the baronetcy? We are a short-lived race, we Manner's, and it sometimes strikes me mine will not be long."

"I am sorry about this affair with your cousin Adelaide," said the Vicar, now anxious to be peace-maker, if possible, with his intended son-in-law, though he was obliged to confess that the prospect looked very dark.

"My cousin Adelaide might employ herself better than by making mischief," answered Sir Hugh, "and you can tell her so, with my compliments."

"It was her anxiety about her brother," said the Vicar.

"Or quite a different feeling," replied Sir Hugh, rising. "But good night, ladies; and let me assure you," he added, addressing Miss Williams, "of my deep regret that any conduct of mine should have.

involved you in such unpleasant, such unjust suspicions."

"Thank you, Sir Hugh," said Miss Williams, and she gave him her hand. She felt grateful to him, and thought even George Manners had judged his cousin harshly; and she was glad afterwards that she had parted with him feeling as she did.





CHAPTER VII.

THE MOUNSEYS' GOVERNESS.

THE Thursday afternoon which Mrs. Mounsey had named in her letter duly came, and Miss Williams went to Oldcastle to be inspected. This is not a very agreeable occupation, dear ladies. You who sit in the world's easy places can scarcely appreciate the feelings with which many a poor woman of birth and education goes up to these painful interviews. Stared at in the hall, and stared at in the drawing-room ; commented on by the footman, and commented on by the mistress ; deprived, too often by some hapless accident, of a position even superior to the would-be patroness, how bitter must this trial be to numbers of sorrowful and sensitive hearts !

"Miss Williams, I presume?" said Mrs. Mounsey, bowing from her red velvet couch to welcome her visitor, without rising.

Miss Williams bowed in return.

"Pray be seated," said the lady of the house, graciously. "You—ah!—are living with the

family of the Rev. Arthur Manners, the Vicar of Narbrough, at present, are you not?"

"Yes," said Miss Williams.

"And why are you leaving your situation?" inquired Mrs. Mounsey.

"The sea air is too strong for me," replied Miss Williams, blushing scarlet.

"Ah! indeed. You look delicate; that is a very serious objection."

"I am not very delicate."

"Ah! Have you any constitutional complaint—any organic disease?"

"No, certainly not."

"And your health is your only reason for leaving Mrs. Manners? May I ask, did she discharge you, or did you resign your situation?"

"I resigned."

"Ah! indeed. Well, as to your attainments? You speak and can teach French, you said in your letter?"

"Yes."

"And as to music? Will you take off your gloves, and give me a little specimen of your capabilities?"

Miss Williams hesitated; but Mrs. Mounsey looked at her so authoritatively, that she timidly arose.

"My hands are very cold," she said. Indeed

she had been shiveringly seeking her way in the town, which was utterly strange to her, for the last hour, in a piercing March wind.

"You can warm them," said Mrs. Mounsey; and so trembling, and conscious that her musical abilities were but small, she sat down to the grand rose-wood piano, and made a very feeble display.

"That will do," said Mrs. Mounsey, presently. "You cannot, I think, expect the forty pounds which you mentioned in your letter as the salary you require, with such a very deficient musical education?"

"That is what I have now."

"But my children are so young—younger than Mrs. Manns', of course; they, no doubt, had a master for music?"

"No."

"You surprise me. Your touch is so very poor. My children know a little of music already. My sister has instructed them; and indeed I should have had no necessity for any further assistance in their education for some years, but unfortunately she has been obliged to leave my house for the South. Our maternal grandmother, Mrs. Gerard, has been suddenly seized with a dangerous disorder, and my sister Laura has been compelled to leave me to attend to our aged relative, who is a lady of some property."

"Indeed."

"Therefore I could not think of giving so high a salary as you ask. I would go as far as 25*l.* perhaps, with board of course, but not including washing; and I think, when you consider the ages of my children, and also that I am somewhat surprised at Mrs. Manners having a governess whose accomplishments appear to be so small, that my offer is very liberal."

"Shall I accept it?—can I accept it?" thought the poor girl opposite to her. "But George, I may see George—perhaps he will be sorry for me then."

"I—I do not know what to say," she faltered.

"I have had many applications," said Mrs. Mounsey, going on with her point-lace work, or rather with poor Laura Clayton's, for Mrs. Mounsey merely put in a few wrong stitches occasionally; "and if you do not think it sufficient, of course——"

"Oh! is the last chance going away—the last chance of seeing him again!" thought Amy Williams, despairingly; so she said, "I—I will agree, as your children are so young."

"And about their wardrobes?" continued Mrs. Mounsey, majestically; "I shall expect you to keep them in order."

"What, make their dresses?"

"My children's best dresses are made at the first milliner's in the town; but I mean, to make their school frocks, and keep them in repair."

"I am afraid I am not a very good work-woman."

"May I ask what you *are* good at, then?" said Mrs. Mounsey, with asperity, "as I have had first-class finishing governesses offered to me for the salary you expected?"

"I can teach singing and sing."

"Will you kindly give me a specimen?"

"Yes," replied Miss Williams. Her nervousness was gone; a feeling of indignation had come in its place, and she sat down again to the piano, and in her clear sweet voice sang so well that Mrs. Mounsey was slightly surprised.

"Your singing is certainly superior to your playing," she said; and as she particularly wished her dear little Louisa to excel in that art, she became a little more civil to the poor governess.

"Are you acquainted with Mr. George Manners?" she asked presently.

"Yes," replied Miss Williams.

"Does he frequently go down to Narbrough Vicarage?"

"Not lately," said Miss Williams, briefly.

"Not lately? Ah! indeed. How is that?"

"Perhaps his business engagements—but I do not know."

"He is a rising young man, Mr. Mounsey says ; a very rising young man—my husband has a great respect for Mr. Manners. And his cousin the Baronet, is he much in the North?"

"He is at the Hall now."

"Ah ! Does he go much to the Vicarage?"

"Oh yes, a good deal."

"Ah ! The first Mrs. Manners, Mr. George Manners's mother, was, I believe, a Manners also ; sister to Lady Manners, the late Sir Hugh's lady, was she not ? But the present one?"

"She is a very nice person."

"But not lady-like, I presume. It was very strange—a gentleman of Mr. Manners's birth and position marrying as he did. But there is no accounting for these things. It must be very uncomfortable for Mr. George Manners seeing his mother's place occupied in such a manner."

"He is very much attached to his stepmother."

"You surprise me ! Attached to his stepmother ? I can scarcely credit that."

"He is indeed. She is just like a mother to him, and he is very fond of the little girls."

"It is very amiable of him, very amiable, indeed. She must have been a great beauty I suppose ; but her manners—are they very deficient?"

"She is so kind to me, I can only speak of her with the greatest gratitude."

"Ah! well, naturally she will not feel the same distinctions of rank which a born lady does," said Mrs. Mounsey, feeling it was her duty to keep Miss Williams in her proper position; though had she not accepted Mr. Mounsey, or rather had not that gentleman proposed for her—and about doing which he had had considerable hesitation, on account of her want of fortune—both she and her sister would probably at this time have been struggling in the world as governesses themselves, being left totally penniless by a bankrupt father. But Mrs. Mounsey was a rich woman now, and had completely forgotten this little possibility, and therefore she treated Miss Williams with becoming dignity.

After a little more hard bargaining, and after promising to mend the house linen in her leisure hours, Miss Williams rose to leave.

"Stay a minute, Miss Williams," said Mrs. Mounsey, rising and ringing the bell, and Miss Williams paused; she thought her hostess was about to order up some refreshments, of which she stood greatly in need.

"Bring down Master and Miss Mounsey," said the mistress of the house, when the servant obeyed her summons. This was the treat she was going

to give the poor tired woman, who had travelled sixty miles to be inspected.

"Well, darlings," said Mrs. Mounsey, her whole face changing as the door opened, and two little white-faced, unhealthy, ugly children were ushered in.

"Well, Johnny, my pet—and Louey—what makes you look so cross? What's vexing mamma's darling?"

"I don't want that woman to come," said Louey, pointing to Miss Williams; "I want auntie."

"But auntie was obliged to go to poor granny, Louey knows—to granny who lives in a pretty house, and has, oh! such pretty china; and perhaps when she dies she may leave Louey some of her pretty things."

"I wish she would die then," remarked Louey.

"Oh! naughty Louey—Louey shouldn't say that. And if this lady comes, Louey must try to be good and learn her lessons—and grow up a wise, wise little lady."

"I don't like her," said Louey.

"Perhaps you will, darling. It's extraordinary do you know, Miss Williams, the power of observation this child has for one so young. She has her likes and her dislikes, I can tell you. Do you like her, Johnny?" she continued, addressing the

little boy, who was sucking his thumb, and regarding Miss Williams with stupid solemnity.

"Yes," replied Johnny, removing that luxury from his mouth; "she's pretty."

"Oh! you complimentary little gentleman! Miss Williams, I mustn't have you turning my son's head," said Mrs. Mounsey, highly delighted with the brilliancy of Johnny's remark.

"And you'll be good, Johnny?" she went on, coaxingly—but Johnny was silent, and would not commit himself to any promises on this point.

"He's high-spirited," said Mrs. Mounsey; "but all boys are. That is what I tell Mr. Mounsey. But what did Johnny do lately? What did naughty Johnny do? and nearly broke poor mamma's heart?"

"Broke my head," said Johnny, again removing his thumb.

"Oh! it was dreadful!" said Mrs. Mounsey—"dreadful! I was lying down; we expected—ah! to be sure, we expected Mr. George Manners to dinner that day, and I heard a fall and a cry. I sprang up, and there—there, when I rushed to the landing, lay my dear little boy, bleeding and senseless, in the hall below."

"I wasn't," said Johnny.

"Wasn't what, darling? But you should not contradict mamma."

"I wasn't," said Johnny, again.

"What does he mean, Louey? Can you tell what he means?"

"He wasn't senseless, ma; he was shouting. That's what he means," replied Louey, who was clever.

"Is that it, Johnny?"

"Yes, it's a pack o' lies."

"Oh, Johnny!"

"I wasn't senseless," said Johnny, determinedly.

"But you were very much hurt?"

"Yes."

"Poor fellow! how he clung to mamma all day. That's true, isn't it, pet?"

"Yes; you gave me toffy."

"Yes, I gave my little darling everything I had. Oh! Johnny must never—never ride on the banisters again. He will promise mamma that?"

"Yes."

"And why? Because poor mamma wishes him not, isn't that the reason?"

"No," replied the truthful Johnny; "'cause I broke my head;" and then he put his thumb into his mouth again, and declined all further conversation.

"I must go now, I think," said Miss Williams, rising; "you will write, then, to Mrs. Manners?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Mounsey, resuming her

dignified manner. "I wish, I am sure, it had been Mr. Manners's first lady; but I suppose it cannot be helped."

After this it was agreed that, should Mrs. Manners's answer be satisfactory, Miss Williams was to enter into her new situation in about three weeks after this interview. "And I assure you I consider you have been very fortunate in securing it," was Mrs. Mounsey's parting address to her new governess; "for I have had so many applications. But of course it depends on what Mrs. Manners says; and I cannot but regret that it is not Mr. George Manners's own mother you could have referred to."

"What will he say when he finds me here?—what will he say?" thought Amy Williams as she descended Mrs. Mounsey's steps. Ah! if that lady could have looked into her heart at that moment, there would have been very short work with the arrangement they had just made.

"To come to my house with a motive," Mrs. Mounsey would have said; "the vile motive of meeting a young man!" Yes, dear madam, that was her motive, and that has been the motive of many a young woman besides. There are pretty speeches said; kindly glances given; affectionate inquiries made—all with a motive too. Miss Williams was going to be Mrs. Mounsey's gover-

ness; going to put up with two cross, spoilt children; to sit in a dull dark schoolroom; to mend and turn Mrs. Mounsey's dresses, and to be bullied and snubbed by that lady; and all for twenty-five pounds a year—and her motive! And it had good need to be a strong one if she had known of various other little agreeable items which lay ready cut out for her in the mind of her kindly patroness.

How strange she felt as she walked down the handsome new street, and looked at the large stone houses on every side. Windsor Street is a new place, and it looked very new. The trees planted in the public garden, in the centre of the semicircle of which it is composed, are still but mere shrubs. The Venetian blinds are new and green. The flower-pots and stands in the open vestibules are of the newest and most elaborate patterns. It is a new place, and is inhabited chiefly by new people—for it is absolutely marvellous how men rise in a town like Oldcastle. A young fellow goes into an office, and probably begins his career there by sweeping it out. But how does he end it?—He ends it often in the highest place. He sits and gives his orders where he once swept the floor. Industry; some lucky speculation; some fortunate waiting for the "tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune"—and the

new man is made. Society opens her arms to him after a little while; smiles on the moneyed man, and sits at his sumptuous table. His wife, perhaps, is a little coarse, but his daughters are not—and all honour to him! He is worthy of his success, most likely. Worthy of it from the patient self-denial he must have exercised when he first entered on the race, not twenty or thirty years back, probably, and maybe trembled before the great man then whose place he now occupies.

But these, perhaps, are extreme cases. The majority of the townspeople have, however, "risen." That is, they began life in a lower social grade than that which they now occupy, and almost all the country homes of the old gentry around are now inhabited by this class; while gorgeous "villas," "parks," and "halls," have sprung up in every direction.

Mr. Peel, Miss Clayton's admirer, is however one of the extreme cases. He began his life as a blacksmith's lad, and laboured at the forge for many a summer's day, and now must often drive past the old workshop on his way to his grand new Hall.

But he has had the good taste not to be all new in his surroundings. He bought a very extensive property, belonging originally to an ancient but decayed Northumbrian family, on which, amidst its grand old trees, stood the family mansion,

crumbling and falling, like the fortunes of its unfortunate possessors.

Mr. Peel pulled down the old house, but he did not cut down the old trees. He drove up in his smart new carriage, through an avenue which had budded and leafed, and budded and leafed again, a hundred years. The old people were all gone—the place had been called by their name, and the village ale-house yet is (though the new proprietor has some idea of changing it, and going with the times); but the old trees stood still. Mr. Peel looked at them with pride through his plate-glass windows, and listened to the cawing of the rooks, and fed fat cattle in the wide vast park—for he could not bear the idea of grass-land being wasted—and never thought of the “fair women and brave men” who had wandered there before him; or of the broken hearts which had gone away to drag out existence in some cheap watering-place abroad, who had been born to inherit the acres he had bought.

The Mounseys, on the contrary, belonged to the other class. Mr. Mounsey's father had been a doctor; a doctor in a very small way; but still a professional man, and he had scraped and pinched, and managed to article his only son to one of the first solicitors in the place.

Mr. Mounsey was a prudent man, and his high

nose was not red in his youth ; and his high nose and light playful ways did him a good turn in those days.

Mr. Gordon, his employer, a well connected, satirical old lawyer, was a bachelor ; but with him lived his maiden sister, Miss Gordon ; who, though neither young nor handsome, had 10,000*l.* of her own, and the smart young clerk in the office knew all about this little fact. How it came about was never known, but it did. One fine morning Dorothy Gordon, spinster, was married to John Mounsey, bachelor, and the chains were riveted too fast for all the law in England to unbind.

Mr. Gordon was a sensible man, and was also a bit of a philosopher, and after his first anger was over, he took the affair very quietly.

"Dorothy was an old fool for her pains," he said. "If she had wanted a husband why had she not taken one before? However, it was her business." But by-and-by he made it his to make the best of it. He took his sister's young husband into partnership, giving him a small share in the business, and Mr. Mounsey had been a "rising man" ever since.

The first Mrs. Mounsey died in course of years, and old Gordon died, and the smart dapper young clerk changed into a middle-aged tiresome man—but very respectable. Every one said Mr. Mounsey

was a most respectable man, and the present Mrs. Mounsey held herself among the highest aristocracy of Oldcastle, and had the greatest respect for her position and herself.

So, among the new streets and the new squares, the poor, tired, cold governess wandered on. She was thinking how often George had trod this pavement—how often looked at this or that. Not that he had ; for he very seldom went among the fashionable quarters of the town, and had not cared much to associate with the greatest people who lived there.

She then found her way to the street where he had lived ; the quiet little off street where old Mrs. Carr, his landlady, daily congratulated herself and her neighbours (much to their disgust) on having such a nice steady young man to lodge with her.

It was a dull little house, Miss Williams thought, after she had found it. Dull, with short yellow blinds to the dull windows of the dull parlour where George had lived. It was not a very grand place for a hero like she thought him to exist in, certainly. It looked very commonplace and shabby ; yet the poor girl stood gazing wistfully in at the window, and with a great throb at her heart, saw George's pipe lying neglected on the mantelpiece, and some cards and letters, which perhaps he had opened and

flung away. Yes, it was only a shabby little room, but it seemed very dear to her ; and this foolish, stupid young woman, after glancing round to see no one was observing her, stooped down and kissed the cold grey smoky stone outside the window, and then turned her tired and weary steps away.





CHAPTER VIII.

SIR HUGH'S LETTER.

EVERY one at Narbrough Vicarage was sorry to part with Miss Williams, as the time drew near for her to go. Even the Vicar felt an uncomfortable twinge occasionally, when he remembered, or rather when he was reminded by his wife, how attentive she had been to their lost little girl; and he also had become rather shaken in his opinion of her previous connexion with Sir Hugh—for ever since the night he spent at the Vicarage, after his quarrel with Adelaide, Mrs. Manners had insisted very strongly on this point.

“There’s nought between them,” she had said to her husband, after his nephew had left. “You take my word of it, Arthur—nought.”

“Well, as *nought*, I suppose, my dear, in your vocabulary, means nothing, I cannot agree with you; there was certainly correspondence.”

“But what’s a line of the pen? Why, she writes to the doctor, for the matter of that, about the children’s pills. I watched Sir Hugh’s face when

he said it, and he was speaking the truth. He didn't look so clear, or speak so glib, when you brought up about Peggy Richardson to him. Poor lass !”

“ He's a fine fellow, I must say,” said the Vicar, twisting his face ; “ a universal conqueror. My dear, I hope you don't admire this precious scamp of a nephew of mine, as I own I should not like to figure in the Divorce Court at my age ?”

“ Now, Arthur, now don't talk nonsense. He's not a good man, I'm afraid, but someway I was sorry for the poor lad to-night, when he said no one had tried to do him any good all these years.”

“ I declare, Nelly, you're falling in love with him ! Hum ! so that's the dodge he is going to try on you, is it ? It's wonderful, really wonderful, what soft creatures women are !”

Nevertheless, his wife's opinion, for she was a shrewd woman in her way, was not without its influence on the Vicar ; and, therefore, after some prudent hesitation, he determined to quiet his conscience by showing his gratitude to Miss Williams, in a way which could not interfere with the remote possibility of his daughter marrying her cousin.

He accordingly told his wife he intended to make Miss Williams a handsome present before she left Narbrough. “ And surely that will satisfy you,

my dear?" he said, in conclusion; upon which, of course, the good woman threw her arms round his neck, and declared he was the kindest and the most generous of men.

A few days after he had made this promise, he took a holiday, and went to Oldcastle to make his intended purchase, returning with a very pretty second-hand gold locket in his possession; also with various other articles which he had considered necessary for his own comfort and pleasure.

The locket, however, he presented to Miss Williams, with his best bow.

"I only wish I was a young man," he said, "and I should have put a lock of my hair into it as a keepsake. But at my age," he added, with a comical, half rueful glance in the glass at his short, faded, and fast-thinning hair, "at my age a lock is too precious."

"Yet I will ask for something," said Miss Williams, smiling—"Will you give me your photograph to put into it?"

This little bit of flattery pleased the Vicar exceedingly, and he was quite facetious about it to his wife in private.

"I will have myself put in at one side," he said, "and Hugh in the other, and poor George must just go in the middle between us. Get quit as fast as you can, my dear Nelly, of this young woman,

for I consider her highly dangerous. And, by-the-bye, that reminds me to ask what has become of Hugh during the past week?"

"You were so sharp with him when he was here last, you see, Arthur," said Mrs. Manners, "that I don't suppose he cares to come back in a hurry;" but during the evening she informed her husband that she had heard, through the servants, that Sir Hugh had left the Hall for the South some days previously.

This information proved correct, for towards the end of the week a letter arrived at the Vicarage from Sir Hugh for Miss Williams, dated from his club in town.

"MY DEAR MISS AMY," he wrote—"You see I took a weary fit of the North all of a sudden, and started off without saying good-bye to any of you. But you must not suppose it was from any neglect; only I was so—what shall I call it?—down, devil-possessed—whatever you like—but so utterly unfit for your pleasant society that I saved you the infliction of my company, and came up here. Well, it is all the same as ever. The same lovely women, at the same old game—the same men—the same pleasures—and, by Jove, the same old weariness and disgust! There goes a young beauty past as I write, splendidly mounted, and with her golden hair streaming behind her (I

wonder how many of those beautiful curls grow on her head !)—and she looks as happy and innocent as the day is long. Yet she's up to her part, the fresh young flower. She knows a dozen fellows are staring at her from the windows here, though to look at her you would not think she knew there was such a thing as a man in the world ! Yes, she's up to a thing or two, I bet a sovereign ; yet she's as good an imitation of nature and innocence as the best French flowers are of the wild roses in the hedge ; but I confess, to my taste, the wild rose itself is what I would prefer to wear in my buttonhole.

“ And what about the brave George ? Have you heard anything of him ? I have not ; but I will let you know when he condescends to answer my letter. But who do you think I met yesterday, in the Park ? Don't throw yourself into a fright now, for the devil himself couldn't write on my face, I suppose, that I had seen you so lately, and knew all his little history ; but Clayton—Clayton in the body, browner, blacker at least, than when I knew him ; but there was no mistaking his sullen, (don't be offended) Jewish physique. I nodded to him—for I felt a kind of curiosity as you may imagine, to hear what he had to say for himself ; and after a moment's hesitation, as if he scarcely had recognised me, he came up and addressed

me, and congratulated me (the deuce take his impudence!) on having succeeded to the family honours. Yet I was sorry for him, too, do you know? There was a kind of restless misery in his expression, which told a tale. Ah, you little witch, how you have tormented this poor man, and racked his heart! Yes, I was sorry for him; and I think, if I had been in his place, I would have had a parting shot at you too (for wasn't that the luxury he promised himself if you left him?). But jesting apart, I won't disguise from you that he looks a *dangerous customer*; for there is a sort of mad look in his eyes which would make me, if I valued my life, try to keep on good terms with him. And do you know, my dear girl, I counsel you to keep to the shelter of your assumed name, and not even at George's entreaty, if you tell him all, to investigate further into this unhappy affair. For (I speak as a friend) I should *be afraid for your life* if he had the chance; and since I have seen Clayton I have quite changed my mind as to the desirability of even endeavouring legally to throw off this odious connexion. No; you try to *forget him*, that's my advice, until some good luck ends his mortal career. And he doesn't look over well, I can tell you. Yellow, bilious, and *mad*. That's just my true opinion; and I'll be sure to hear if anything happens to him, through the old regi-

mental men ; one of whom, by-the-bye (Donovan), I have seen this morning.

“ ‘ I saw Clayton yesterday,’ I said.

“ ‘ Ay, he’s hanging about town. How that affair has changed him. Do you know, I think he is touched here,’ and Donovan touched his own grey head as he spoke. So you see it is not my own conviction only that I am going on.

“ You’ll write to me, wont you, and tell me all the gossip ? And in the meanwhile, and for ever (Oh my cousin, if you saw this !) believe me your sincere friend—

“ H. MANNERS.”

This was not a pleasant letter to receive. It is not a pleasant sensation, certainly, to think that a gentleman slightly affected in his head by fever, drink, sunstroke, and jealousy, is going about the world seeking you for the purpose of avenging his wrongs, real or imaginary. Amy Barritt, or Clayton, to drop for once her assumed name, was by no means a strong-minded woman ; and though she had been wishing to die of late—that is, gradually to fade away of a broken heart, or consumption, or something which would have appealed to George’s feelings, and overcome his hard-heartedness—she by no means relished the idea of leaving this world as suddenly as her half-mad husband

had promised to send her ; and *fear*, absolute fear, crept into her heart as she read Sir Hugh's letter, and thought how easily some fatal chance might reveal her hiding-place.

She did not tell Mrs. Manners that she had heard from her nephew, and she did not tell her she had answered his letter—conveying that document in haste and secrecy to a distant post-office ; knowing that the good woman who presided over that of Narbrough, would not improbably have some interest in her neighbours' concerns, and comment on the fact of "the Vicar's Governess writing to the young Baronet."

So, ashamed of deceiving her kind friend, and oppressed by her terrible secret, the last two weeks which she was to spend at the Vicarage wore for her wearily on. She told Sir Hugh, in her letter, of her intended change of residence, but at the same time implored him not to visit her in Oldcastle, on his return to the North, or to appear cognisant that she was there.

Oh ! what a tangled web we weave,
When first we venture to deceive !

for she was afraid of the mistaken view Mrs. Manners might naturally take of their intimacy, if it was continued—afraid also of not trusting Sir Hugh, who, if he chose, might revenge himself so cruelly. So, throwing herself on his pity, she asked him to

befriend her, "and not to render her life more utterly wretched than it was." And well for her Sir Hugh's heart was filled with a deeper and a stronger feeling than that with which she inspired him; for otherwise—had, in fact, his own wishes clashed with his cousin's—he was not a man to hesitate whose he should serve; and neither pity nor honour would have stood in his way if any strong motive had actuated him. As it was, however, though he had a kind of liking for the "pretty little Governess," as he called her, his love for beautiful Peggy Richardson was passionate and overpowering; while all the good left in his heart had been touched and increased by her unselfish devotion to himself. "My little Peggy—my bonny Peggy," he would think, as he looked at the aristocratic beauties of his world; "she's worth a score of them!" And that poor faithful heart was gladdened very often during his absence by receiving written assurances of his love, and she used to sit for hours on the lonely shore thinking of some fond word or look, and dreaming of their sweet renewal.

So Sir Hugh Manners only laughed over the tremulous appealing little note which he received from "Miss Amy," in reply to his letter, and answered it in his usual half-jesting strain. "Don't be afraid of me," he wrote, "and I'll do what I

can to help you"—and thus, against her will as it were, Miss Williams was thrust into confidence and correspondence with the very man whom, for the sake of George Manners, she was most anxious to avoid. She felt like a hypocrite also, as she listened to the kindly parting assurances of affection from Mrs. Manners, coupled as they frequently were with earnest advice to keep her new home a secret from Sir Hugh; and this feeling naturally increased her depression and sorrow at the prospect of leaving; and the last few days she spent at Narbrough were melancholy in the extreme.

She had a strange interview also with "Pretty Peggy," before she left. Coming by accident upon her sitting on the links, gazing with her great brown eyes unconsciously at the sea, while in her hand, which she was holding against her cheek, as if leaning against something loving and beloved, was an open letter, of which Miss Williams could very easily guess the writer. So absorbed was she in her thoughts, that Miss Williams was close to her before she became aware of her presence; but when she did see her she started guiltily, coloured, and hastily hid the letter in her bosom, and hung her head low, as the governess passed, who had not intended to address her. But scarcely had she done so, before pity, and perhaps some fellow-feeling for this poor girl, arrested her steps, and looking back

she saw Peggy again laying her face against her precious letter, with an expression of such sorrowful and touching devotion, as if it made up to her for all the slights and scorn which she yet felt so keenly, that Miss Williams almost involuntarily paused and smiled, saying kindly, "Is that you, Peggy? How is your father?"

"He's pretty well, miss," she answered, rising with a sort of proud humility in her attitude and manner.

"You like sitting here?" said Miss Williams, scarce knowing what to say to her, yet feeling greatly interested in her.

"Ay," said the girl, "it's quiet and away fra the other folks."

"You don't care much for company, then?"

Peggy shook her head.

"You have no little brothers or sisters, have you, Peggy?"

"Nane, miss—nor mother"—and she sighed as she spoke.

"But you have friends?"

"Friends! What are friends?" answered the girl, scornfully. "Will they cling to ye when ye're down, and watch ye when ye're sick? Na—na; friends are a' pleasant enough in the sunshine and the day, but wait till the storm and the night comes on, and where are y'r fine friends?"

"It is very true, I fear."

"There's some true love though—true to death ; but it's not th' lukewarm kindness folks give friends—it's different fra that !"

"What is it then ?"

"What a woman feels to her bairn, I think," said she, turning away her head, "and—and—to——." Then she stopped, while her white throat, which Miss Williams could still see, grew crimson.

"I have often thought about you lately, Peggy," said Miss Williams, nervously.

"Why, miss ?" she answered quickly, in a changed voice.

"You say you have no mother, Peggy—and—and a girl——"

"Don't talk of it, miss, don't talk of it," interrupted Peggy ; "it's no use."

"You mean about Sir Hugh ?"

"It's best to say nought—but oh ! miss, don't judge me hard ! He told me you were a good, kind lady—don't be very hard on me."

"I am not, Peggy. God knows I pity you, my poor girl, with my whole heart."

"But why, miss ?" and she drew herself up to her full height—"why d'ye pity me so much ?"

"Because people say you love Hugh Manners—and—and—that he has wronged and left you."

"What do they know with their foul tongues?" she answered, passionately. "Left me! He hasn't left me. If I love him, he has given me love back—all his heart's love, he says. Ay," she added, more softly, "that's written here;" and she touched his letter with her other hand, which she was holding to her bosom beneath her shawl.

"I am glad it is so," said Miss Williams, earnestly; "glad for your sake, and for his."

"Oh, miss! may I talk to you a bit?—it's such a comfort," said poor Peggy, the tears rising in her eyes. "He says he's changed—since—since we grew so fond like; and oh!—perhaps it's a sin—but I love him so much—if I could do anything for him—if I could die for him," she continued, looking upwards, "that—that he might know; but even then he could never—never know all I feel here."

"You have given him much at any rate," answered Miss Williams, almost bitterly.

"I should say nought," said Peggy, with sudden reserve. "How I've let my silly tongue run on. You will not tell him, miss, will you?"

"You need not be afraid of me, Peggy."

"Na, I ken that—I ken it by y'r face."

"I am very—very sorry for you," said Miss Williams, holding out her hand. "I wish I could help you."

"But, miss," replied the girl, eagerly clasping it, "you need na be sorry for me. I've been"—and a deep rose-bloom spread over her lovely face as she spoke—"I've been so happy—oh! so—so happy! when I've been wi' him."

"But that cannot be always, Peggy?"

"Na; but those bits o' sunshine are worth a' my life besides."

"He ought to care for you very much."

"He does, miss," she answered, earnestly; "e'en for me—a poor untaught lass, whose naught to give him but a faithful heart."

"Peggy, there is no such gift," said Miss Williams, with much emotion. "Sir Hugh will not find much love like yours. He ought to treasure it. I pray, Peggy, he may live to do you justice."

"Miss, his good is more to me than mine. I wadna injure him. I'm content if he but loves me still, and if he changed——"

"Well, Peggy?"

"I could but die," said the poor girl, almost in a whisper.

"I trust that he will not," said Miss Williams, feeling, however, how poor was the chance. "Good-bye, Peggy. I hope you will be happy."

"Ay, miss!" and she made a sort of shy movement, and the next minute stooped down and kissed Miss Williams's hand.

"The God in heaven bless you," she said, in her sweet, pathetic voice; "the Lord Himself take you in His keeping. You haven't scorned me as some do; maybe the day will come they'll know they had no call: but—but—I thank you for your goodness;" and, drawing her shawl round her tall form, Peggy turned quickly away.


"No wonder he loves her," thought Miss Williams; "how beautiful she is!"





CHAPTER IX.

AT WINDSOR STREET.

N the first of April, nearly eight months after her first arrival there, Miss Williams left Narbrough. All the partings, tearful, affectionate, and, on the Vicar's part, slightly jocular, came to an end at last ; and, laden with pretty gifts from the children, and with eatables for her journey from Mrs. Manners, she left the station with a tear-stained face and a sorrowful heart, and with the genuine regrets of the whole household to accompany her.

"I'll see thy bonny face no more," old Alsie, the fisher woman, had said to her on her last visit to her lowly cottage, "till we meet together in the Kingdom. Let me see it there, dear lass, as kind and pure as now ;" and, coming near to her, the old woman pressed her withered and trembling lips against her forehead, and blessed her, and bid her farewell.

"My little lass died in thy arms," she said, "and thy good deeds shall not perish ;" and as Miss

Williams went on her lonely journey to Oldcastle, poor Alsie's blessing recurred to her mind, giving her heart some kind of vague comfort and hope.

It was about seven in the evening when she reached Oldcastle ; and having collected her luggage, she took a cab and drove to Windsor Street, where she was expected, as she had written to inform Mrs. Mounsey by what train she would arrive.

But she found no kindly hostess waiting to receive her. The hall-door was opened by a very smart maid, who immediately said—

“ Oh ! you'll be the new governess ? Cabby, bring in her boxes ; ” and as Miss Williams stood waiting, purse in hand, to pay her fare, she heard witticisms exchanged between the cabman and the maid-servant on the size and quantity of her luggage.

“ What, another ! ” said the maid, with a giggle ; then she turned round and addressed Miss Williams : “ Oh, miss,” she said, “ mistress desired me to say you had to go up to the schoolroom when you came ; the children are at a juvenile party, but will be back by eight, and you're to see them to bed.”

“ Is Mrs. Mounsey at home ? ” asked Miss Williams.

“ Master and she are out dining,” replied the girl, pertly ; “ and how I'm to carry all them boxes

up to the attic I'm sure I don't know ; I'll have to get cook to help."

"But I don't want them taken to the attic—I want them taken to my room. I cannot do without them," said Miss Williams.

"Well, but your room is to be the big attic," answered the maid. "Indeed, we've had a fine fuss shifting. Cook and I slept there, and now we're to go into the back one, and you're to have the front. It's all ready ; but however we're to get all your big boxes up them narrow stairs, I can't guess."

"I can hire a man to do it, if you like ; here is a shilling to give him."

"Oh, miss, there's no occasion for that," said the girl, somewhat ashamed of herself. "Cook and I, I daresay, can manage. Would you like to come up to the schoolroom now?"

It was a bare, cold, comfortless room, looking out into the back yard and the stables, and was furnished with all the shabby old furniture which Mr. Mounsey had inherited from his father, the doctor, and which had been in his possession some sixty years before he had bequeathed it to his rising son.

"The fire's bad," said the maid, giving the cold grate a poke—and indeed it was, for it was out—"but I'll fetch up a bit stick, and it'll soon burn

up again, for it's cold still; though indeed mistress says this month the fire ought to be put out."

"It is very cold," said Amy Williams, shivering.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" asked the housemaid, looking at the slight figure before her with some kindness; "you seem so tired like."

"I am very tired, and would be glad of some tea and a fire."

"Well, I'll just carry a bit out of the kitchen. Mistress would be in a fine tantrum if she knew—filling the house with smoke and filth, she says; but she's out, more the comfort, so I'll run down, and carry up a bit live coal."

The housemaid was as good as her word, and in half an hour Miss Williams was sitting by a tolerable fire, and drinking some tolerable tea; but for all that, how miserable she felt. She saw what kind of treatment she must expect from this cold reception; saw the long weary days she would spend in this dull room; but she might see George, and as that sweet thought stole into her heart she smiled, and tried to make the best of her two tired, cross little pupils, who shortly afterwards arrived from their juvenile party—Johnny being exceedingly sick with having over-eaten himself at supper. In vain they endeavoured to induce him to go to bed; he would not till mamma came, he said, and slapped Louey when that young lady tried to coerce

him, who slapped back, and then both rolled on the floor, fighting and crying.

"Did you ever see two sich?" said the housemaid, who had been standing for the last quarter of an hour trying to persuade Johnny to go to bed. "Mistress just completely spoils them; that's the truth—I'm sure, miss, you'll have your hands full between them."

"I'll tell mamma you say she spoils us, Jane," said Louey, rising and drying her eyes; "I'll tell her how you talk."

"Just do—and my blessing on you, that's all! Come you to bed, Miss Louey, and we'll leave that bad boy, and the black man will come and take him away."

"Come upon my knee, Johnny," said Miss Williams, making an effort to lift the great, heavy boy from the floor. But he only screamed louder when she touched him, so they were compelled to leave him, and he finally fell asleep where he was, and was carried off in that condition by Jane, who declared to Miss Williams "she was sick and weary of it all."

"Indeed, I gave up the mistress after Miss Laura left, miss," went on the girl; "for, as I told her, I wasn't hired to be child's-maid and housemaid too; but she said you were coming, so I just stayed on—and I wish you joy of them, I

do, for they're the bothersomest brats I ever came across."

It was a pleasant prospect, and Miss Williams sat enjoying it for the next two hours alone, and then she heard the master and mistress of the establishment arrive. Presently a rustle of silk garments was heard on the stairs, and the door opened, and Mrs. Mounsey, handsome and gracious, came in to welcome her new inmate.

"Well, you have arrived I see, Miss Williams," she said, with a slight bow, "and Jane tells me my little boy has been very unwell since he came in. I hope you have seen about him? Have you been up to look at him lately?"

"I did not know even where to look, Mrs. Mounsey. The servant put him to bed."

"Oh—well, in future I expect, of course, that you will; and you will hear them their prayers, I hope, Miss Williams; and they each have a bath. I think baths are very conducive to health, and dear little Johnny has not a strong stomach; it is easily upset, and I shall expect you to be very careful about him."

"Yes."

"How did you leave Mrs. Manners's family? They were all well, I hope?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Well, I shall not detain you, as it is late; we have had a dinner party at our friend Mr. Peel's of

Newforth Hall. What a delightful place he has—such luxury ; what a thing it is to be rich—there's nothing like it."

"It saves one from much sorrow, at any rate," sighed the poor governess.

"Of course, one ought to be satisfied to occupy the position in which a wise Providence has placed us," said Mrs. Mounsey, who did not like the tone of Miss Williams's remarks. "I think nothing shows a weak mind more than that foolish habit of repining which some women indulge in. Mr. Peel is now reaping the reward of a life of successful industry, and, as I tell Mr. Mounsey, the style he lives in makes me feel a little envious—not, of course, that I have not every comfort ; but it's such a beautiful place, and the county-people are quite beginning to notice him."

"Indeed !"

"Oh yes ; but he likes our little quiet dinners better than anything else. He is so fond of the children. He bought Louey a most beautiful rocking-horse the other day—paid three guineas for it ; but then, of course, money is no object to him ; yes, I quite envy Mr. Peel ; but I must not stand talking here. I will just peep in at the children, and then go to bed, for I feel a little tired. Good-night, Miss Williams, we will arrange about your duties and the lessons in the morning ;" and once

more bowing, Mrs. Mounsey swept her handsome self and her handsome dress out of the room.

The next morning she did not look so well. She was too sharp-looking. Sharp-featured, and slightly angular in figure, and with a dissatisfied, sharp expression, contracting a face which probably in her youth had not worn it, but which gradually was growing stronger, as all expressions arising from any leading characteristic will. She was a selfish woman, and therefore not a happy one; a vain one, and therefore being continually annoyed, for she liked not to hear others praised for looks, or wit, or riches, or any good thing under the sun. She was jealous of her handsome sister, yet conscious that the wealthy marriage which she would probably form with Mr. Peel would be an advantage to herself. She grudged Laura her dress and her beauty, as she did that of all younger and prettier women, yet she felt both were necessary to procure her this position; and now, while Miss Williams was standing looking at her perhaps somewhat curiously, when she came into the school-room soon after breakfast, having taken that meal in her own room, she was examining her new governess with surprise, and also with vexation, for she had never noticed before that she was exceedingly pretty.

This was easily accounted for, as the day when

Miss Williams first called at Windsor Street to apply for her situation had been a bitterly cold one, and the poor governess was delicate and naturally depressed, and therefore by no means looking her best. But now, as she stood with the full morning light falling on her fair, almost lovely face, and abundant and well-dressed hair, Mrs. Mounsey was struck with the extreme unsuitability of her appearance, and also with the handsome materials of her costume; for during her brief married life Captain Clayton had lavished on her the most expensive dress and ornaments, some of which she was still wearing, and which Mrs. Mounsey (as Adelaide Manners had done before her) was now mentally condemning as highly improper for a governess.

"Were your friends in good circumstances previous to your going out into the world, Miss Williams?" she asked; for delicacy of feeling was not one of Mrs. Mounsey's attributes.

"How do you mean?" replied Miss Williams, blushing scarlet.

"What, may I ask, was your father?" said Mrs. Mounsey.

"He was——" and then she stopped. She was going to say he was a solicitor; but she suddenly remembered that Mr. Mounsey was one also, and that through any law-list her false name

might be discovered ; so hesitating and confused, she faltered out, " He—he was a gentleman."

" Do you mean he had no employment?" inquired Mrs. Mounsey, fixing her sharp, grey eyes on the blushing face before her. " Very extraordinary, that's all I can say. Where, may I ask, did this gentleman live?"

" Mrs. Mounsey," said Miss Williams, recovering from her confusion at the extreme rudeness of her interrogator, " my father was a gentleman, who became unfortunate in his circumstances, and any other question you wish to ask I had better refer you to Mrs. Manners, or to my other referee, Mrs. Ross, who is the wife of Colonel Ross."

" Oh, did you reside in a Colonel Ross's family, then?"

" Yes, for some time, but only as a friend. But about the children's lessons? Do you wish Louisa to be taught French; she tells me she has not yet commenced?"

" Yes," answered Mrs. Mounsey, slowly. She could not well go on with her questions after this; but she felt very much aggrieved.

" I do not think Miss Williams is satisfactory at all, Mr. Mounsey—not at all," was her verdict to her husband, when she went downstairs; but for once Mr. Mounsey did not agree with her, when he saw the new governess at luncheon.

"I think she seems a very lady-like person, mamma," he said, and he was about to add—"good-looking, too;" but for the sake of peace he checked himself in time.

"Do you?" answered Mrs. Mounsey. "Well, I cannot say I ever did admire over-dressed young persons in any subordinate situation, and I never will."





CHAPTER X.

MR. PEEL'S HOUSE.

IT was very hard work, very ; day by day trying to please a selfish, exacting woman, and teach two untractable, spoilt children ; and what made it harder was that Mrs. Mounsey interfered with everything, and instructed Louey and Johnny "to tell mamma" whatever was done or said to them in the schoolroom.

In vain Miss Williams tried to exert her authority—in vain, by turns, coaxed or threatened to punish them.

"I allow no servant or person of any kind to strike my children," said Mrs. Mounsey, with awful severity to her, one day, when irritated past endurance, she gave Johnny a slight slap on his white, fat cheek. Oh ! what a roaring ensued ; and then up came mamma to see what was the matter with her darling.

"She has slapped me ! she has slapped me !" screamed Johnny, rolling on the floor in his passion.

"Did Miss Williams strike Johnny, Louey?" said Mrs. Mounsey, though the supposed culprit was standing there to give an answer for herself.

"Yes, ma," replied Louey; "she gave him a slap—a good slap, too."

Then Mrs. Mounsey made the speech above recorded, and Miss Williams was interdicted from giving them a little wholesome chastisement in future.

All this was not very pleasant; not very agreeable to a delicate, lady-like woman in bad health, and with other anxieties pressing constantly on her mind. It was no wonder then that Miss Williams grew thinner and paler, and that Mrs. Mounsey became gradually consoled as to her personal appearance. "She is not really pretty after all," she said to herself, nearly every day after Miss Williams had been a month in Windsor Street. About that time, however, a change took place in the household, which decidedly was for the better for the poor governess; for their grandmother, Mrs. Gerard, having died suddenly, Miss Laura Clayton returned to Oldcastle, and Miss Williams found at least a kind and sympathizing companion.

"I think we might dispense with Miss Williams when Laura returns," Mrs. Mounsey had said to her husband, on the news arriving of their grand-

mother's death; but Mr. Mounsey thought this impolitic.

"I think, Louisa, we should consider—yes, consider twice before taking such a step. Now—of course, ha—none of us could be—well, unaware of our friend Peel's marked attentions to Laura, and ha—hope now they will come to a desirable conclusion."

"But what has that to do with Miss Williams? It is only an expense keeping her till Laura does marry, and I think her very useless."

"Why, you see, mamma, for one thing our darlings take up a good deal of Laura's time; and to tell you the truth, Peel hinted to me the other day he thought it was better we had a governess. You see he is a rich man, and people might say—ah, well—I think we had better keep Miss Williams for the present; at least till we see how things turn out—till our belle perhaps sets the bells a-ringing—ha, ha, ha."

"Really, Mr. Mounsey, I wish you would get over that way you have of punning."

"Ha, ha, ha, 'cease your funning—cease your funning,' cease your *punning*; that's your reading of it, mamma. Well, well, we'll see; but why not vary life's dull round with a little joke now and then?—it's no joke unless one does, I think, ha, ha."

So it was fixed, and Miss Williams did not receive notice when Miss Clayton came home, and somehow even the dull, dreary schoolroom seemed brighter for her genial presence.

"How handsome she is," thought poor Amy Williams, the day of her arrival, when after dinner she came upstairs brilliant and blooming as usual, and, after rapping at the door, came in, holding out her hand to the governess and introducing herself.

"I fear you have terrible uphill work with them," she said, alluding to her little nephew and niece; "my sister's over-affection for her children has made them very difficult to manage; I know it from experience."

"I don't get on with them very well, I'm afraid," answered Miss Williams.

"Do not despair. Do you know, I think they are improved. I hear you sing, and I have come up to ask if you will give us the pleasure of your company in the drawing-room to-night? There is no one but ourselves and Mr. Peel."

It was the first time she had been asked down since she had entered the house, and she hesitated.

"Do come," said Miss Clayton, "it will be a little change for you—it is very dull up here."

So she went down, and Laura Clayton sat beside her, and talked to her; and presently a grey-haired, stout, comely old gentleman and Mr. Mounsey

entered the room, and Miss Williams heard them addressing the stranger as Mr. Peel.

"Well, ladies," said he, advancing towards them with the comfortable assurance of a rich man, "how do you propose to spend the evening?"

"I think a drive would be very pleasant, don't you, Laura?" said Mrs. Mounsey, who was languidly fanning herself. "It is so hot."

"Then allow me to ring for my servants and order my carriage, which I trust you will find very commodious," said Mr. Peel; "and would you, ladies, do me the honour of driving as far as Newforth Hall? I have a show of choice roses in the greenhouse, at present in full bloom, which I should like Miss Laura to see. I think I have heard you, Miss Laura, express great admiration for that flower."

"Yes, indeed," answered Miss Clayton. "Do you know, Louisa, I think it would be a very good idea. Will you go?"

"Yes, and beg a few roses into the bargain, if Mr. Peel will allow me," said Mrs. Mounsey.

"I am sure Mrs. Mounsey and Miss Clayton both know they are perfectly welcome to anything at Newforth Hall," said Mr. Peel, with an old-fashioned bow.

"The owner included, eh, Peel?" put in Mr. Mounsey. "Ha, ha, ha, you shouldn't make such

offers, Peel ; the ladies will be taking you at your word."

"I trust one of them will some day," replied Mr. Peel, with another bow to Miss Clayton ; but she only turned her head somewhat impatiently away.

"You will come with us?" she said, the next minute, kindly to Miss Williams, "the fresh evening air will do you good."

"My dear Laura, there will be no room in the carriage," remarked Mrs. Mounsey, repressively.

"Oh yes," she answered, "such a gallant man as Mr. Peel, I am sure, wont object to a little overcrowding. Allow me, Mr. Peel, to introduce Miss Williams to you."

"I shall have much pleasure in Miss Williams's company," he replied. "There is plenty of room ; either Mounsey or I can ride on the box."

"Oh, I'll do that ; always room for a pretty girl, eh, Peel?" said Mr. Mounsey, who was a little elevated.

"Really, Mr. Mounsey," said his wife.

"Come, come, mamma, none of your grave looks," he answered. "You ladies need not quarrel about beauty ; you have all enough, and to spare. Not often you will see such, eh, Peel?"

This compliment was not without its effect, and the whole party started together in little more than a quarter of an hour, and were swiftly borne out of

the town, and through the long woodland lanes which led to Newforth Hall, in Mr. Peel's luxurious carriage.

"Certainly it was a great temptation," thought Amy Williams, sitting by Mr. Peel's side, and looking at the lovely, blooming woman opposite to him, as they drove up the splendid oak avenue, all fresh and green with the tints of early summer, for she had heard in the household hints of Mr. Peel's supposed intentions. "A great temptation to become mistress of a place like this, and to have ease, comfort, and wealth all one's life long." But then there was another side of the question, and Miss Clayton was debating it in her mind also as she looked on the smooth, green lawn, dotted with its purple beeches, and lit up into wonderful beauty and brightness by the setting sun, and then at the smooth, good-tempered, plain, rosy face, with its white scrubby whiskers and beard, which had all this luxury to bestow.

"I could have done it better once," she thought, and sighed; and looking up, saw the governess's large soft eyes fixed curiously on her face.

Both these young women thought at that moment of the same person.

"And he knew this beautiful woman," said Amy Williams to herself, with a jealous pang at her heart.

"And he was constantly thrown with a sweet, loveable creature like this," reflected Miss Clayton. "Ah, now I am beginning to understand—this was George Manners's grief."

They went over the grounds, and admired the roses, and drank champagne, and ate forced strawberries; and Mr. Peel, in his old-fashioned gallantry, offered his arm to the married lady, and only paid Miss Clayton attention by proxy; and, Mr. Mounsey being constant to the champagne, it happened that for a few minutes the young ladies were left alone together, and with a certain hesitation in her manner, which Amy Williams noticed, Miss Clayton said—

"You know Mr. George Manners, I suppose?" And though it was growing dusk, she blushed as she spoke.

"Yes," answered Miss Williams, turning pale, as we do under the influence of any violent agitation.

"He went every week down to Narbrough, did he not?" Miss Clayton went on.

"Not always—oh no!—not always."

"I thought he told me he did so. He used to come occasionally to my sister's, and I have met him there. Do you think him handsome?"

"I—I—do not know," faltered Amy Williams; and then she added, "yes, I suppose he is."

"And his cousin, what is he like?"

"You mean Sir Hugh? Oh, he is very handsome! He is down at the Hall just now; I heard from Mrs. Manners this morning."

"Do you know when Mr. George Manners will return?"

"No; Mrs. Manners said she had heard from him, and that he talked of coming home shortly; but I do not know."

"And what will you young ladies do now?" said Mr. Peel, approaching them, Mrs. Mounsey having returned to the strawberries and champagne in the drawing-room.

"Go home, Mr. Peel," replied Miss Clayton, laughing; "and we have to thank you for a most charming evening."

"Miss Clayton makes every place charming," answered the old gentleman. "Do not you agree with me, Miss Williams?"

Mr. Peel escorted them home, and Mr. Mounsey, between the champagne and the rich man's marked attentions, became very hilarious, and his puns and jokes were more overwhelming than ever.

"It is such—such nights as these—friendly, genial—ah, with congenial—ah, souls which make me proud of my countrymen," he ejaculated in a very disconnected manner from the driving-box of the carriage. "Peel, I am proud of you—

give me your hand—British merchant—friend—ah——;” and then he began nodding, and Mr. Peel was compelled to direct the coachman to keep his eye on the drowsy gentleman by his side.

“You have made a disgusting exhibition of yourself,” said his wife, angrily, when they reached home and Mr. Peel was gone; “I am ashamed of you, Mr. Mounsey!”

“My dear—I—I—mamma, forgive me—let me kiss you, mamma,” said Mr. Mounsey, reeling.

“Go to bed,” replied his helpmate. “Laura, take him to bed; I cannot bear to look at him.” And so poor Mr. Mounsey was carried off, and had a frightful headache the next day, from which Mrs. Mounsey did not fail to draw a moral.





CHAPTER XI.

GEORGE'S RETURN.

THERE was a letter lying on the breakfast-table for Amy Williams the next morning, when she came down rather later than usual—a letter which Miss Clayton had been glancing at with no small curiosity for several minutes before, for it was from Narbrough, and directed in a gentleman's handwriting; and when Miss Williams entered, and lifted it up, a deep blush overspread her face.

Mr. and Mrs. Mounsey were not yet down, and Miss Clayton, who was making the tea, said at once—

“Do not let me prevent you opening your letter, Miss Williams. I see it is from your friends at Narbrough.”

“Yes,” answered Miss Williams, incautiously, “from Sir——” and she paused.

“What, from Sir Hugh Manners!” exclaimed Miss Clayton, with some surprise in her voice, and a strange joy in her heart. “But pardon me—

how rude I am—as if I had any business to ask who your letters are from.”

“I became intimate with Sir Hugh through some circumstances connected with my early life,” explained Miss Williams, anxious to account for the fact of her correspondence with the baronet. “I met Sir Hugh before I went to Narbrough.”

“Indeed, before you met his cousin?”

“Yes.”

“And you say he is very handsome?”

“He is considered so, at least.”

“Is he like Mr. George Manners?”

“Oh no—his features are more perfect.”

“Well, do not let me interrupt you—you can tell me, you know, if there is any news,” said Miss Laura, with a pleased smile, beginning to pour out the tea; she felt glad, somehow, about this letter from Sir Hugh.

There was, however, no special news in the letter. He had got back to the Hall, and he had seen Adelaide, who had tried to make up to him, he wrote; and George had never answered his letter, and he had seen nothing more of Clayton. That was about all—“except,” he added, “that he had asked Donovan as to Clayton’s whereabouts, and that he had told him he had gone down to the neighbourhood of Liverpool to visit his own people.” This was the extent of Sir Hugh’s informa-

tion, and told in his usual careless, unconnected fashion; but as Amy Williams read the paragraph relating to Captain Clayton, a sudden and, to her, very terrible suspicion rushed for the first time into her mind.

"Miss Clayton," she said the next minute, "have you any relations in Liverpool?"

"Not now," answered that young lady, who had been looking with secret joy at the changing and agitated face before her. "But why do you ask? Does Sir Hugh Manners know any of us Claytons?"

"I—I think not," replied Amy Williams, with great hesitation, for her nature was truthful; "but he mentions Liverpool."

"It is a fine town, I knew it well once—but that is long ago," added Miss Clayton, with a sigh; and Amy dare not ask her any further questions; yet a kind of painful dread remained in her mind, that her unhappy husband might be some connexion of this family's.

Mr. Peel called during the morning, bringing a most splendid basket of flowers and strawberries "for the ladies," and Laura brought up a plateful of the last-named luxuries into the schoolroom for Miss Williams and the children, as soon as he was gone.

"You see what your friend Mr. Peel has brought

us this morning," she said to Amy, with a smile, as she presented them.

"I wish I had such a delightfully rich lover," answered the governess, laughing. "You make us all envy you, Miss Clayton."

"He is a kind, good man," replied Laura, almost gravely, "that's what I value more than his riches; yet, God forgive me for saying so," she added the next moment; "no, it's the money, Miss Williams, that's the truth, whatever fine language we clothe it in; what a difference it makes—the difference of one's whole life."

"Yes, indeed—of happiness or misery, too often."

"But it should not be so; for instance, for I suppose you mean about marriage, as that generally makes most women's happiness or misery, who have any fine feelings at all; yet how often do men pause and hesitate till it's too late, because, forsooth, they have not the means to begin the world with as their fathers end it? If two people love each other, why do they not start together in a cottage? That surely would be happier than waiting and waiting, or worse, wedding without tenderness and love."

"Yet, how many women do that?"

"Most do, I think—but why? I do not believe it is the women who are all to blame. Girls marry

rich men after some disappointment of which the world perhaps little dreamt. They marry for fine houses and carriages, and they have no motive after that to cultivate the noblest and tenderest feelings of our nature. They become debased, and they debase their children after them. 'It is a good match,' we say; 'he is a rich man;' 'she will have everything she wants;' but a woman's heart wants something more than these things, or she becomes degraded—the idle creature of fashion, of whom we see so many around us. My reading of the cause of the frivolous character of most of our women is—they marry without love."

"Yet," and Miss Williams hesitated, for she was thinking of Mr. Peel.

"Yet we all do it," said Miss Clayton, thoughtfully. "Yes, but some of us have good cause. The heart only knows its own bitterness, Miss Williams, and I pity from mine all girls born in the position of ladies who are dependent."

"It is a most painful position."

"There is none like it. The lower classes have all employments laid out for them, which are open to their choice—the servant, the shop-girl—these are independent. They can work without losing caste, and marry whom they love. But the poor lady—we cannot wonder, perhaps, that they should prefer the humiliation of taking any husband who

can offer them a home, to the constant humiliations of seeking new ones among strangers, or worse—eating the grudged bread bestowed by rich relations and friends.”

“Yet do not do it, Miss Clayton,” said Miss Williams, emphatically. “God only knows the horror—the shameful horror——” and then she paused, her thoughts naturally recurring to her own unhappy experience.

“You speak strongly on this point, Miss Williams,” said Laura, rather in a surprised tone.

“Yes, for—for—I have seen it—I have known it; better anything, any unkindness and neglect you can experience in the world, than the feeling that you cannot give the love which you know it is your duty to give.”

“But suppose you thoroughly respect your husband?”

“In that case, I believe it might come; but it is a great risk, and one I would not like to see any one I cared for run.”

“Perhaps not,” answered Miss Clayton; and then she sighed, and changed the conversation.

“How pretty that girl upstairs is,” she said, later in the day, to her sister. “I wonder what her story is? I fear a sad one.”

“Oh, I daresay not,” replied Mrs. Mounsey, sharply. “How romantic you are, Laura. These

people in general, I believe, rather rise than lose position by going out into the world. She will be some small tradesman's daughter, probably. I've no patience with the false cry about the way governesses are treated. I think they are treated very well."

"Yes, I daresay; but still the position is painful."

"How do you mean?—living with every ease and comfort around them. Just look at Miss Williams: what has she to complain of?"

"My dear Louisa, she is a pretty young woman, and probably does not exactly like spending her life in a back sitting-room, with two children for her companions."

"You astonish me, Laura—really astonish me—with such opinions. What do you want, pray? That she should dine with us? Really, it is too absurd."

"Well, don't be angry," said Miss Clayton, smiling. "I don't want anything. I was only talking of governesses' lives in general, not of hers. You know I ought to have some interest in the subject, Louisa, since, if you and Mr. Mounsey had not offered me a home, I should have been compelled to be a governess myself, or to have gone into the workhouse."

"How can you say such things, Laura! You are my own sister, and this was your natural home

as I told Mr. Mounsey—though I had some trouble with him about it; but he's so obstinate, and such a fool into the bargain, too," added his handsome wife, frowning. "Did you ever see anything like him last night?"

"He got a little elevated, that was all. Come, Louisa, I am sure he is a most excellent husband, and you've all your own way."

"Oh, as to that, a woman's a fool who has not; particularly if she marries an elderly man like Mr. Mounsey. But about Mr. Peel, Laura? I think there is no doubt as to his intentions now, and it will be a splendid match for you."

"Yes," answered Laura Clayton, in anything but an elated voice.

"You don't mean to say that for an instant you would hesitate?" said her sister, quickly, noticing her tone. "But you would never do that, surely; just consider, Laura, you have not a farthing in the world, and I assure you it falls very heavily on me entirely supplying your wardrobe. I owe Miss Lenado nearly a hundred pounds, and one of the largest items in her bill is your blue silk. It is really selfish of you even to think of such a thing. I hoped, of course, if you married Mr. Peel, you would repay me something at least of what you have cost me; and Mr. Mounsey, so disagreeable about money too."

"He hasn't asked me yet," said Miss Clayton, with some bitterness; "do not be in such a hurry."

"I'm in no hurry; you need not mistake me, and be for ever snapping up one's words; in no hurry—but I say a girl, and not a very young girl too, would be mad to refuse such an excellent establishment for life, and I hope you will never think of it."

"And my feelings?"

"Bah! don't talk like a romantic schoolgirl, please, Laura. Marry him, and then indulge your feelings—when you can afford to pay for them;" and with these last words Mrs. Mounsey tossed up her head, and went out of the room, loudly shutting the door behind her, and left her sister alone.

Long and thoughtfully she sat thus. She was reflecting on her position. She had not a farthing in the world, as Mrs. Mounsey had just said; not a farthing, this handsome, brilliant woman, which she could call her own, and the bread she was eating just then seemed to her to be very bitter.

"My own sister," she thought, sorrowfully; "my only sister, who knows everything—who shared all our early difficulties and struggles, and who, but for Mr. Mounsey, would have been in the same position—to speak thus. But if I marry him"—and her head drooped lower—"what do I

give up?—a fancy, a foolish fancy, at best, for a young man who probably never thinks of me—who perhaps cares for some one else. Yet I do not think there can be anything between him and this Miss Williams, or she would never be writing to his cousin, Sir Hugh. No; but that is not to say he would ever learn to love me. I wish I had never seen him—I wish I could drive him from my thoughts.”

Again and again Laura Clayton thought this; again and again counted over the advantages (and she was a woman who could appreciate them) that she would gain by marrying Mr. Peel. “Louisa would not taunt me then,” she reflected, “and *he* perhaps would not care.” Still her mind was undecided, and she was yet mentally discussing the subject when she heard the front bell ring, and a visitor ascending the stairs, and rising hastily, she was just about leaving the room, when the door opened and the servant announced—“Mr. Manners,” and the next instant George entered, and cordially held out his hand.

“You have got back, then?” said Miss Clayton, with some confusion.

“Yes, and I have not forgotten Mr. Mounsey’s commission; the caviare is all safe. I gave it to the servant in the hall,” replied George, in a lively manner.

"When did you arrive?" asked Laura.

"Only last night, and I feel so unsettled to-day that I came to bore you with an account of my adventures; for it's a pleasure to have some one to listen to one, and my poor old landlady is deaf."

"A flattering reason for your early visit, I must say."

"Forgive me, Miss Clayton," laughed George, pleasantly; "you know what a bear I am of old; perhaps I only really wanted to find an excuse for the pleasure of seeing you again."

A bright flush came into Miss Clayton's face. "I was thinking of you," she said, "as you came in."

"How was that?" said George; and then he added, "I am glad to see you looking so well. But why do you wear mourning?"

"Our grandmother, poor old Mrs. Gerard, is dead. I only returned to Oldcastle a few days ago, for I was attending her during her last illness; and you—you, too, look well. Have you done what you said you would do—you remember—left your troubles behind you?"

"Forgotten them," answered George. "Is that the way—the wisest way?"

"I believe so. Ah, I envy you men; you hold your fate in your own hands."

"Not always; but don't ladies also?"

"Of course," replied Laura, lightly; "but I must ring and let my sister know you are here. I daresay the servant thought she was in the room, for she had only left it shortly before you came."

"Oh, she'll come down presently. Don't disturb her pray on my account. I was going to tell you my adventures, you know."

"Well, begin then. What was the most striking?"

"I hope I have made some money, for one thing," said George, laughing; "but would you believe it, I have little or nothing else to tell? I arrived safely, and I got back safely. I was entertained at St. Petersburg in a very grand manner by the English merchants there, but they and their chicks are just like merchants and their families here, with the exception, I think, that the children speak a dozen languages or so; and I met with no adventures, except I travelled part of the way with a very pretty girl, and just when I was beginning to get spoony, and she highly agreeable, we stopped at a station, and there was a great, bearded, ugly fellow waiting for her, who took her in his arms, and kissed her very affectionately. '*Mon mari,*' said she, in the prettiest French accent in the world—for she was a Pole, and we had been talking French, and there I was carried away,

leaving the lovely creature with her great, greasy Russian."

"What despair you must have been in!"

"Well, I declare I was low-spirited for the next ten miles, and kept growling at fate, and feeling it was very hard that an ugly fellow like that should have such a pretty little wife, while I should be a disconsolate bachelor."

"I believe you are growing vain."

"Is that vain? Well, I suppose it is; and now tell me all your adventures."

"I have had none; for the last two months I have been in poor grandmamma's sick room, and never saw any one but the doctor."

"It was very kind of you."

"Oh no! I was only doing what I could not avoid doing."

"I hope she left you some money?"

Laura Clayton shook her head. "No," she said; "her income died principally with her, and what she had to leave she left years ago to her only son. She could make no alteration in her will, poor thing, after I went to her—her mind was gone."

"Yet you are as bright and as charming as ever, after such a trial," said George, looking at her with real admiration. "You talk about envying men—I envy you your cheerful, unselfish nature."

"You are trying to make up now, I see, for your first pretty speech," said Laura, smiling.

"Don't expect pretty speeches from me, Miss Clayton; it isn't in me."

"Well, talking about pretty things, reminds me," she answered, looking at him steadily, "that we have some one very pretty in the house just now, who knows you, and whom you know."

"Indeed! And who may that be?"

"Your stepmother's late governess, Miss Williams. She has left Narbrough, you know, and my sister has engaged her."

In spite of himself, a deep flush at once spread over George Manners's brown face as Miss Clayton said this, and his voice sounded very forced and strange as he answered—

"I—I—am very much surprised."

"I thought I should surprise you," said Laura; "though," she added, for a moment leaving her better nature behind in the first jealous pang at his evident agitation at the mention of Amy Williams's name, "though I thought perhaps you might have known, as your cousin, Sir Hugh, is well informed as to her movements at all events, for he writes to her. She received a letter from him this morning."

"I am not so highly honoured as Sir Hugh, you see," answered George, biting his lips, and pulling

his moustaches nervously, and with his face growing white and damp with the cold and bitter feeling at his heart.

"She is very pretty," said Laura Clayton, half-ashamed already at what she had said about Sir Hugh's letter.

"Is she?" replied George Manners, absently; and then he added, rousing himself, "Ah, yes, she is pretty. Hugh, you see, has good taste. But what new music have you got? I heard such a charming song at St. Petersburg; I thought of you when I heard it, and so I bought it, and brought it home. Will you honour me by accepting it?"

"I am very much obliged to you."

"What for? For wanting to gratify myself? Never feel any obligation to any one in this world, Miss Clayton. You have no need to. We do things to please ourselves, we men and women, not others. Self is the grand pivot on which all our actions turn."

"Ah! do not say that."

"If it does not please you, I won't; but it's true, for all that. We flatter people when we want them, or anything from them, so don't pray be taken in by any civility."

"What has made you so bitter all of a sudden?"

"Hugh Manners used to say the world had made him so; perhaps I had better quote his creed. But

I do not mean to be bitter. I mean to be highly agreeable, so what shall we talk about? But here is your sister. Well, Mrs. Mounsey, how has the world treated you since we met?"

Mrs. Mounsey received their visitor with the greatest *empressement*. She had an idea, somehow, that he admired her, and admiration was grateful to her as the dew of the morning. She was a very virtuous matron, and shuddered at the mention of any poor fallen creature who had not this advantage; but she had no objection to indulge in a little platonic, sentimental flirtation with any good-looking young man who gave her the chance. Not many had, and therefore Mrs. Mounsey considered herself the pattern of propriety; yet she blushed, absolutely blushed, as she held out her hand to welcome George Manners.

"I am so glad you have come back," she said, "so very glad. You must dine with us, of course? Nay, I will take no excuse. Laura, dear, run down and tell cook to give us something very good; and now I want to hear all your adventures."

Mrs. Mounsey intended that Mr. Manners should think her a very charming woman, and she actually partly succeeded, for which of us is above the gratification of flattered vanity? But, at the same time, in his heart was gnawing too strong a pain to allow him to have any pleasure in the society of

the most charming woman in the world; so he would not stay—improvising some excuse of an engagement at home, but offering at the same time to come any other day which would suit them.

“Come to-morrow, then,” said Mrs. Mounsey; and George Mannors accepted her invitation.

But when he was again alone, what overpowering anger and bitterness he felt.

“What!” he thought, as he walked hurriedly on through the streets after he had left the Mounseys; “what! not content with the vile scheme to take me in at home, she must actually follow me here—follow me with her lover writing to her at the very time perhaps, to see how she gets on. Hugh shall answer to me for this. I have looked over a great deal, but this is too much. And to write as he did—swearing as to her innocence; she’s about as innocent as himself—about as pure and as true. But what a fool I am to make myself miserable about her! She’s not worth it—not worth a pang. I’ll show her she has no power to wound me—no power at all, for I’ll go to the Mounseys’. Why should I not? Laura Clayton is a noble, beautiful woman—why should I not learn to love her, and not this poor creature Hugh has cast off? It was worthy of him truly to expect I would marry his mistress.”



CHAPTER XII.

A LITTLE DINNER IN WINDSOR STREET.

THE Mounseys indulged in the sometimes not very agreeable fashion of having, when they entertained company, the children down to dessert; and one of the duties Miss Williams was expected to fulfil was to wash and dress them for this public appearance.

"Miss Williams," said Mrs. Mounsey, who seemed in an exceedingly good humour, addressing her governess at luncheon the day after George Manners's visit, "I wish you to put Johnny on his blue velvet for dessert to-day, and Louey her rose silk. We expect a young friend to dinner—ah! to be sure, you will know him by name, for it is Mr. George Manners. He has returned from St. Petersburg, and called here yesterday before he went any way else—wasn't it, Laura?"

"Yes," answered her sister, looking keenly at the pale face opposite to her; "yes, he has not even been down to Narbrough yet."

"Did you see much of him when you were with

his stepmother?" went on Mrs. Mounsey. "I mean, of course, was he often at home?"

"A good deal," replied the governess, with a strange huskiness in her voice.

"He is very good-looking," said Mrs. Mounsey, "so *distinguée*. Yes, I must say I admire a gentlemanly-looking man more than anything else, but it's birth. One can tell the *sang bleu* at a glance, cannot one, Laura?"

"I do not know," said Miss Clayton; "I have seen a very handsome fisherman."

"Oh yes; handsome, I daresay, as regards mere features, but it isn't that. It's the nameless air, the——" and Mrs. Mounsey paused for want of a suitable metaphor.

"Which stamps the class of Vere de Vere," quoted Miss Clayton, pleasantly.

"Well, it does," answered Mrs. Mounsey. "Mr. Tennyson, or any other poet or revolutionist, may write or say what they like, but I can tell a well-born man or woman at a glance, and Mr. Manners is one."

"Mr. Manners ought to be highly flattered, Louisa," said Miss Clayton, with a smile.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Mrs. Mounsey. "Oh no, dear, we must not tell him. Shall we ask Mr. Peel to meet him, Laura? The old fellow might throw some business into his hands, couldn't he?"

You must persuade him. I had better ask him to dinner."

"No, no, no," said Laura Clayton, quickly; "no, Louisa, not to-day. Remember, Mr. Manners was going to tell you all about his journey; another person would only be in the way."

"And Mr. Peel is so tiresome," said Mrs. Mounsey, forgetting her audience; "that is, I mean," she went on, correcting herself, "he is so—he's a very nice man, Mr. Peel, a very nice man."

"Does tiresome mean nice, too, ma?" asked Louey, in her sharp, thin voice.

"Little girls shouldn't ask questions," said mamma.

"Tiresome means nasty," said Johnny, his mouth full of pudding. "Ma means Mr. Peel is nasty."

"Oh, Johnny! when he is so kind. Didn't he bring the strawberries? Weren't they nice?"

"Yes, they were."

"Well, wasn't Mr. Peel nice then for bringing them for dear little Johnny from his beautiful hot-houses? Johnny must say yes."

"The strawberries were," persisted Johnny. "Auntie Laura, 'ou marry him, and then we'll always get strawberries."

"What folly," said Laura, rising in some anger. "Hold your tongue, Johnny, you deserve a whipping," and she went out of the room.

"Then you'll see about their dress?" said Mrs. Mounsey, again addressing Miss Williams. "I want them to look very nice. Mind you brush their hair well. How long did you brush the Miss Manners's hair a day?"

"I never brushed it at all. The child's-maid dressed and undressed them. I had nothing to do with it."

"But they were much older," said Mrs. Mounsey. "Ah, well, different families have different arrangements. I fancy, had you lived with the first Mrs. Manners, you would have been expected to do it; but of course this present poor lady——"

"Is one of the kindest and best women in the world," said Amy Williams, the colour rising in her face with sudden force.

"I daresay; but you'll see about the children? Send them down when John rings the dining-room bell twice;" and having thus given her orders, Mrs. Mounsey moved gracefully away.

"Will I see him?" thought Amy Williams, after she was gone. "Will they ask me to go down? Ah, George!—my George! am I near you?—my darling—my darling; will I see you again?"

"I wish you would attend to us, Miss Williams!" said Louey, presently. "Johnny has asked for his ball twice. Mamma says you are not attentive, and I do not think you are."

"What do you say?" answered Amy Williams; and all day long it was the same thing. She could give her mind to nothing else. He was coming—he would be in the same house with her, at any rate, and breathe the same air. "And we must meet soon," thought the poor governess; "and then he shall know all—know I am not utterly false and unworthy, as he thinks me now."

She heard his ring at the door about seven, and stole out to the top of the landing, and looked down as he came up the stairs. She saw him then; saw the strong, handsome, marked, brown face, with the same soft eyes, she knew so well. "Who was like him?" she thought. "No wonder women admired him, with that noble, gentle face." Presently she heard his laugh—his laugh and his deep, sweet voice—laughing and talking to others, while she, his love—she whose cheek had lain against his, stood listening, trembling there.

Then dinner was announced, and Mrs. Mounsey, leaning on George's arm, came out of the drawing-room.

"I hope we shall often see you?" said the hostess, as they passed on.

"I shall be too happy," he answered; and then came the other two—beautiful Laura and fat, punchy Mr. Mounsey.

"I had a little business to-day, Laura, with

your friend Mr. Peel," Mr. Mounsey was saying. "A most agreeable little business, ha! ha! ha! Something not tending to check our friendship, for it was a *cheque*, and a very handsome one too;" and she heard no more, only the murmur of their voices in the distance—only George's laugh sometimes; so she crept back, and began dressing her two tiresome little charges to appear at dessert.

By-and-by they also went downstairs, and then, after a little while, the ladies came up; but still no message was sent to Amy Williams to present herself in the drawing-room. Laura Clayton did not mention it, and it never occurred to Mrs. Mounsey. She called it "stepping out of their place" for any little amusement or pleasure to be enjoyed by a dependent.

So, sick and silent, the poor girl waited upstairs—half dispirited, half afraid. "Shall I go and meet him, as he leaves the dining-room?" she was asking herself. "Shall I hold out my hand and say, oh! George, let it be right between us now; I am so friendless, and alone." At last she made up her mind to do so; but she had forgotten Mr. Mounsey.

She heard the dining-room door open, and she rushed to the landing and looked over. There was George, certainly—George, flushed, handsome, and smiling; but, by his side, with two fat fingers

laid on his shoulder, was Mr. Mounsey and his joke!—"As I say, ha! ha! ha! to the children, when my friend Mr. Peel comes, and he is peeling their oranges, they must not say, *Peel away*; so I say to you now, ha! ha! ha!—I say to you now, I hope in future we will never long be without *manners* in the house, ha! ha! ha!—I must tell mamma that, she will be——" then the drawing-room door opened and shut, and confused voices and murmurings were all that she could hear.

How long the night seemed—how dreary. Would it never end? Then Miss Clayton's rich, sweet voice singing, stole upstairs. "What may tomorrow bring? Who can tell?" sang Laura. "Ay," thought the weary listener, "who can tell?—who can tell?"

Still she waited. He must come out again—he must go downstairs, and she might have a chance of speaking to him then. But no, when the door again opened, the two sisters appeared, and stood exchanging friendly adieux with the departing guest, and Mr. Mounsey accompanied him to the hall.

"Good-night, Miss Clayton," said George, pausing one moment before he descended the stairs, and looking at Miss Clayton's handsome face, on which the lamplight shone; "good-night—I shall not forget that song;" then he turned,

but he looked back again and smiled ; and thus Amy Williams saw again her own dear love !

" I declare, I believe that woman upstairs is going to take very ill," said Mrs. Mounsey the next day to her sister. " How haggard and old she looks this morning. I believe she is going into a consumption ; it would be well to get quit of her in time, wouldn't it ?"

" She looks very ill," answered Laura Clayton, gravely.

" Did you tell Mr. Manners we had her here ?" asked Mrs. Mounsey.

" Yea."

" Did he seem to know anything about her ?"

" He said very little, but I fancy—I do not know though."

" What ?"

" Well, that there has been some annoyance or other about her ; but Mr. Manners on some points is very reserved."

" But if I had thought there had been any impropriety, or lightness of conduct, she should go at once. I cannot endure anything of that sort."

" Oh no, I daresay not," answered Laura ; yet in her heart she almost wished that her sister would send the poor governess away. But she did not tell her of Sir Hugh's letter—not yet at least ; but still she wished that she would go.

The following day after he had dined at Windsor Street, George went down to Narbrough.

"My dear George," said Mrs. Manners, as soon as he appeared, folding him in her arms; "how glad I am to see you—how thankful. We have been so dull without you; the place hasn't been like itself."

"And the chicks?" asked George; "and my father?"

"Oh, the Vicar's well and hale, dear, and Katie and Dolly too; but Milly isn't—she pines like. Oh! Georgie, what will I do if she is taken away like the other!"

"Nonsense, mother, don't get nervous."

"Ay, but it isn't only me. Dr. Ruthyen thinks but poorly of her. I fancy she's fretted ever since Miss Williams left; we all miss her so. Georgie, have you seen her? She's gone to live at Oldcastle, at some Mounseys. Do you know anything of them?"

"Yes; I know them, but I have not seen Miss Williams, mother," he added, the next moment, abruptly; "what on earth induced her to go to Oldcastle? To go where I may have a chance of seeing her?"

"Why, you see, Georgie, places are bad to get," hesitated Mrs. Manners, "and she saw this one advertised, and after what you said she would go from here."

"She was right," said George, sharply.

"Well, dear, I don't understand it; you both know your own affairs best; but one thing I'm certain of, Amy Williams is nought to Sir Hugh, and Sir Hugh nought to her."

"Ah! mother, they can make you believe that, but not me."

"But, dear, why, they say Sir Hugh's really wed Pretty Peggy; that's all the talk in the village now, I can tell you. He's wrapt up in her anyhow; every day most they meet together, and he goes no way, or cares to go no way; your sister and he hardly speak now, there's such a talk about him."

"Yes," said George, bitterly, "he is weary of the other one; but Peggy's turn will come also—Hugh is choice, I must say, in his amusements."

"Do you know, dear, I like him now better than I ever did before? There's something honester about him, I fancy. They say he's really fond of Peggy, and she, poor lass, is just mad about him, and loves the very ground he treads on."

"Don't speak of him, mother, any more," said George, frowning, "it's only painful—or of her; I try to feel like a Christian man," he went on, with a darkening face, "but it's hard to do so when I think of Hugh Manners."

Mrs. Manners only sighed in reply to this out-

burst, and said no more on the subject; but the children were not so reticent.

"Oh! Georgie," whispered Milly, who was sitting on his knee an hour afterwards, "why did you make Willy go away?"

"Hush, Milly; I didn't," answered George, uneasily.

"Oh, but you did," persisted the child; "and she cried so, and it's so dull without her; we have no fun now—no stories. Oh! I wish you would ask her to come back?"

"She is better away, Milly," said George, with a kind of groan, putting his little sister down as he spoke; "better away——" but somehow home did not seem very happy to him during this visit. The children were always talking of "Willy," as they called their late governess, and besides this he shrank with a kind of nervous dread from meeting his cousin.

"The devil would rise within me, I am sure, at the sight of his pale face," he told himself, and ground his teeth and bit his lips as he made the reflection. But he told himself, at the same time, that he was quite indifferent to Amy Williams; that she was utterly worthless, and that Hugh was welcome to her for him. So he went back to Old-castle; and he went back to Windsor Street; and he flirted with and admired Miss Clayton, and

took off his hat one day, with a cold stiff bow, to a very pale, drooping young woman walking on the road with two children, while he was riding by the brilliant Laura's side.

"There are the chicks," said she, pointing to them with her riding-whip, "and their governess."

"So I see," answered George, laconically; but the next minute he shivered. "How cold it is," he said, though it was midsummer, and the sun shining on the wide, green moor.

"Do you think so?" said Miss Clayton, and she looked at him earnestly; "you cannot surely be well?"

"Oh yes," he replied, carelessly, "as well as a fellow need be, Miss Clayton; a few years, you know, and we'll be yonder," and he nodded at the adjoining cemetery, which lay at the opposite side of the road.

"Yes," she answered, sadly; and she sighed, for life was very sweet to Laura Clayton.

"We'll get to the end of our work some day, at any rate," said George Manners; "God be thanked."

"But do you not shrink from it?"

"Not I. I shrink from the thought sometimes of the long, weary years to come—from death, never."

"You are not happy, Mr. Manners?"

"Is any one? Yes, the vain man is, I believe; but he who can estimate aright his own heart and those of others has no very bright or happy picture ever lying before his eyes."

"You speak like a disappointed man."

"Do I look one?" answered George, lightly. "Do I look like a fellow wearing the willow, and pining away for the sake of some fair damsel who despises my pretensions? No, Miss Clayton, do not think me rude, but I do not believe one in a thousand of your sex is either worth pining or sighing for."

"But why?"

"Because you are mostly false; but let us have a gallop, my hands feel numb."

"I do not understand him," said Laura Clayton to herself that night, as she was brushing her hair. "I think he likes me, and yet he is so strange—he is not happy about something—and *is it worth the sacrifice?*" And her thoughts went back to New-forth Hall—to the old man and his great riches—to power and wealth, and the world's sweet smiles. "If I were sure he cared for me," she said, and a warm blush stole over her fine cheeks; "but as it is, I think I will not ride again with Mr. George Manners—at least, not just now."



CHAPTER XIII.

ONCE MORE.

I MUST see him—I will see him,” Amy Williams determined a day or two after this, for hitherto she had waited and waited for an opportunity of doing so in vain. George Manners had been frequently in Windsor Street, but she had never met him. There was, in fact, a sort of tacit arrangement between the sisters to that effect.

“I will have no nonsense going on in my house,” thought Mrs. Mounsey. “She is better out of his way,” decided Laura Clayton; so Amy Williams, the dependent, was quietly kept in the background, and George came and came again to the house, “to see Miss Clayton,” he told himself; but he wanted in truth to see some one else besides.

He wanted to be rude to her; to crush her with his indifference and contempt; but still to see her. There was a strange, unsatisfied craving in his heart to do this. A sort of passionate emotion which was indeed love still, though love full of misery

and disrespect. For, in spite of himself—in spite of his reason, and his admiration for handsome Laura Clayton, this feeling had the mastery of him yet.

He had been back to Oldcastle nearly three weeks, and he had never, except that brief moment on the moor, seen Miss Williams, and Mrs. Mounsey and Miss Clayton rarely mentioned her name.

“It is much better,” he often reflected; “I am glad, at least, that she has the decency to keep out of my way;” but the next time he went to the Mounseys, even while he hung over Laura Clayton as she sang, or talked nonsense with Mrs. Mounsey, he was still listening for a voice or a footstep which he yet remembered too well. But he never saw or heard her, for it did not occur to him to look up above his head at the pale, eager face, which nightly watched his departure from the top of the high landing.

“I will see him—I must see him,” resolved Amy Williams then one night, a few days after she had met him riding with Miss Clayton, and when as usual she had had the misery or satisfaction of hearing and seeing his farewells to another woman, and on the following morning she acted on this determination.

“May I have a holiday this afternoon?” she

said to Mrs. Mounsey at luncheon-time. "I wish to go out."

"A holiday?" repeated Mrs. Mounsey. "May I ask what for?"

"I wish to go and see some friends," said Amy Williams, desperately; "I wish to go about four."

"Some friends! Ah, I did not know you had any in this town?"

"Nor have I," answered the governess, with irresistible bitterness, which however was entirely lost on Mrs. Mounsey; "they live a little out of town."

"Ah, well, I do not know, I am sure—not this afternoon at least, I am afraid, as I have made no arrangements for any one else to take charge of the children. You should have given me notice sooner, if you wished to go to-day."

"Let me do that," said Laura Clayton, cheerfully, who was sitting by. "I will gladly take charge of them this afternoon; so I hope, Louisa, you will not object to Miss Williams's going?"

"But you are going out to pay visits with me, Laura," said Mrs. Mounsey; "it is very inconvenient."

"We can put them off, or you can go alone," answered her sister. "A little change will, I am sure, do Miss Williams good; and I am sorry,"

she added, "that I have never proposed before to take charge of the youngsters."

"Well, Miss Williams, you can go then, since Miss Clayton is good enough to undertake your duties," said Mrs. Mounsey; "only be sure you are not late in returning."

"Very well," replied Amy Williams, while she mentally added, "by that time I will have learnt my fate—by that time I will have seen George Manners."

She dressed herself to go out, more as she used to do at Narbrough than in her usual quiet Old-castle attire; so much so, that Mrs. Mounsey, who was by no means above peeping through the Venetian blinds to see her governess's departure, or indeed her servants sometimes, cried out—

"Come here, Laura; just look at Miss Williams. Did you ever see such a ridiculous get-up for a person in her situation?"

"Well, why shouldn't she be smart, poor thing?" answered Laura Clayton, looking up from her lace-work, but not rising. "Do you know, Louisa, I think you should allow her to go out more. She looks very delicate, and that schoolroom is very close."

"Nonsense, Laura, *do not be so absurd!* Wait till you have a house of your own to manage, but do not interfere with mine. I consider Miss

Williams a very useless, die-away sort of person, and I shall certainly get quit of her if I hear of any one more suitable. She has only been here two months, and to ask to go out for a whole day so soon is, I consider, very forward."

Meanwhile, Amy Williams was finding her way out of the fashionable squares of new houses, of which Windsor Street is one, to the quiet little row where she knew George Manners still lived, and where she had gone the day she first came to Old-castle.

She easily found it. How often had she thought of that shabby little house since then—how often wished to go and look at it once more. But as she was never out without the children, and prating, sharp-tongued Miss Louey was always repeating everything in the drawing-room, she had not dared to attempt it. But she was free now—free to wander up and down the quiet flag-way in front of it—free to wait till George came home, and she meant to do so.

It was a heavy, hot, thundery afternoon. Dull, grey clouds, laden with vapour, were bearing up against the wind; and with a sort of pang, Amy looked at the angry sky.

"It will be a storm," she said, "but what matter? I *will* see him, whatever it is; our meeting needs no sunshine now."

It was five o'clock when she reached Bolton Street, where George lived, but she knew he rarely left his office until then.

"But if he should go to Windsor Street," she suddenly thought—"but no, no, not again to-day, surely—no, I will see him here."

She walked up and down twice, and the third time, when she turned at the end of the street, she saw George's tall figure appear round the corner, and with head bent down and hasty steps he quickly advanced towards her.

Her heart beat so violently, and with such great physical pain, for the next few moments, that she could scarcely walk; but George, unconscious and absorbed, rapidly approached her—only seeing her, and lifting up his head when she spoke.

"George," she said, "George——" and she held out her hand.

Then he started, recognised her, and bit his lips, and turned first red and then pale, and finally held out his hand also and took hers.

"We have met again at last," said Amy, as her trembling hand touched his cold palm.

"Yes," said George, slowly; "are you well?"

"Do I look so, George?" she answered, looking up into his face. "How could I be, after all these long, miserable months?"

"It is no good to speak of such things," replied

George, recovering himself, and speaking coldly and sharply. "You are comfortable, I hope, with Mrs. Mounsey?" he added.

"Oh! why do you speak like this?" she said; "no, I am not comfortable—I am miserable and unhappy; but mostly so, George, at your unjust suspicions—at your coldness and anger."

"It is going to rain," said George nervously, looking up towards the sky, from whence a few heavy raindrops were falling. "What is the good of this discussion? I have made my decision, and I hope you have made yours also; we are best as strangers."

"But we are not strangers," answered the poor woman; "oh! George, you know that. I have wandered and waited to meet you. I said I must see you again, or I should die."

"For God's sake do not speak like that, remember where you are."

"Sir Hugh wrote to you to explain, did he not?" went on Amy, pleadingly. "Did you get his letter—he told me you had never answered it?"

"You might have spared me the mention of his name, I think," said George, sternly; "yes, I got his letter; but I believed it about as much as I believe his words—or," he added, with great bitterness, "or yours."

"Then it is no use," said Amy, turning away in

her despair. "Oh! has it come to this. Good-bye, then, George Manners, and may God forgive you for embittering the last hours of my miserable life."

"What do you mean?" said George, with sudden suspicion.

"I cannot bear it," said the unfortunate girl, leaning back against the railings of the house before which they were standing; "you make me suffer too much."

"Amy," began George, and then he looked at the fair, faded face and frail form before him with a sort of compassion; "I could forgive you anything," he added, more gently, "but the way you have deceived and cajoled me."

"How do you mean?"

"Why do you pretend to love me?" he asked, passionately, "what object have you in it? If Hugh is weary of you, there are other men richer and younger than I am—make them your dupes, and leave me alone."

"You can say this!" she answered, looking at him with some natural indignation. "You—well, George, good-bye, then."

"Which way are you going?" said George; "see how heavily it is raining; and look, there is a flash—I knew it would thunder; it is a long way to Windsor Street—you will be wet through before

you get there—you had better take shelter in my rooms."

"It is no matter," said Amy Williams, slowly and with a bitter sigh; and there was something so utterly heart-broken and despairing in her looks and manner, that George determined not to leave her.

"Come," he said, "it is but a few doors further up; come with me."

"The rain will do me no harm," she replied; "nor the thunder, nor lightning, nor anything else now. Good-bye, George—a long good-bye."

"What do you mean?" said George. "What has happened to you, to make you all at once like this? It is months since I told you everything must end between us—it is nothing new; but come with me now. I daresay Mrs. Carr has a fire, as it is wet, and you are shivering with cold. Come, I am not going to let you go."

She made no answer, but looked at him with looks full of misery; and, on him again urging her to accompany him home, began walking forward silently by his side.

"Yes, I will go with him," she thought. "I will give him one more kiss, and then somehow or other will end it all."

It had, indeed, come to this. At that moment she felt so utterly heart-broken at his determined

coldness and estrangement, that death seemed her only refuge, and George read something of this in her stricken face.

"Here we are," he said, stopping at the door of his lodgings. "By Jove, how it is raining! why, your dress is wet through already. Mrs. Carr—Mrs. Carr!" he cried, as soon as they were in the passage, and the deaf old woman who kept the house hurried up to obey his summons.

"Here is my sister come to pay us a visit, Mrs. Carr," went on George, hastily, as soon as she appeared. "Light the fire at once; and now, Amy, come in."

The table was laid ready for his dinner, and the room was neat and well furnished, and in a few minutes old Mrs. Carr had a cheerful fire blazing on the hearth, and George pushed his easy-chair close to it.

"There, pull off your boots," he said, "and warm your feet; and now have a glass of wine."

"Shall I bring up dinner, sir?" asked the landlady.

"Yes; come, Amy, drink it," he said, to his pale guest in the easy-chair. "Are you a little warmer now? What a flash!—and the thunder so near. Are you afraid of thunder?"

"No, not now," she answered, almost in a whisper.

"How well you are under shelter—you would have been drenched outside. There's another flash!—are you getting warm?" and he touched her hand, but it was very cold.

"What makes you so cold?" he asked; "are you faint?"—and he knelt down on the hearth-rug beside her, and the firelight danced on his handsome, excited face—and the poor girl sitting there looked at him, and covered her face, and burst into passionate tears.

"Hush! hush!" said George, taking her hand; "hush! don't cry like that. It will do no good now. Hush, Amy, hush!"

"If you would but believe me!" she sobbed. "But believe that Hugh Manners is nothing to me—nothing, I swear it," she continued, with a sort of wild energy—"by all that is sacred—by all that is holy. He knows my history—the unfortunate history of my life—that alone is the tie between us."

"And that history," said George, rising and turning away his head, "I suppose is such that I had better never hear."

"I thought so," answered Amy Williams, rising also, and taking his hand. "I thought so, George—for it would part us; but let me do Sir Hugh justice, he urged me to tell you. He said it were better you should know."

"Oh, my God!" said George Manners, pushing back her hand, and beginning to pace with hasty steps up and down the little room, "that I should ever have loved you—that I should ever have loved a woman whose past I cannot know, and which others do. Why do you look so pure and fair, Amy, with such shameful secrets hidden in your breast?"

"But they are not shameful. Oh, George! believe me—it's my foolish love for you only which makes me hide it. You know I love you, don't you?" and her head fell on his shoulder, "only too well."

"Yes," and he turned his face slowly towards her, and put his arms round her, and crushed her to his breast—"yes, I believe you love me *now*."

"How dark it is," said Amy, the next minute, with a kind of shiver.

"Yes, it's a fit day for our meeting, Amy—in darkness and gloom—a fit, fit day."

"The sun may shine again, George," she whispered.

"No, never the same—never the same," he answered, gloomily; "for what can wash a stained name, or mend broken trust and faith?"

"Would we had met in my early girlhood!" sighed Amy.

"Ay, or not at all. But, by heavens! here is:

that fool, Mounsey," exclaimed George, the next moment, "and he saw me!" Indeed, it was Mr. Mounsey, rushing for shelter past the window, for an instant after, the door-bell pealed violently.

"Amy, run upstairs," continued George; "or, no, stay, go to the kitchen with Mrs. Carr. It will never do for him to see you here."

"Yes," said she, hastily, "yes, George, and good-bye, George;" but there was no time for further farewells, for Mr. Mounsey, excited by the rain, or the dread of the lightning, was again pealing at the bell.

"Wait a moment, Mrs. Carr," said George, as calmly as he could, meeting the landlady, as she hurried to the door to obey Mr. Mounsey's summons—"wait a minute before you open the door. My sister does not know this gentleman, and she has her boots off. Will you let her sit by your kitchen fire till he goes?"

"Surely, surely," answered Mrs. Carr. "Come down, miss. Why, the man's going to break the bell, whoever he is; go down them steps, and I'll just let him in."

Ashamed and terrified, Amy fled down the kitchen steps, and began putting on her boots at once when she got there as fast as she could, and then, after drying her eyes, she determined to leave immediately.

"It's that Mr. Mounsey," said Mrs. Carr, returning grumbling into the kitchen. "He, I think, might have waited a minute. I mind the day well when he'd be glad to wait at any one's door; but he's got on now, and his betters must serve him."

"I—I think I will go now," said Amy, timidly.

"What do ye say, honey? I'm a bit hard of hearing just now with a cold, but sit ye down. I'm glad you've come to see your brother, for I think he's a bit lonesome sometimes o' nights now—not so cheery as he used to be."

"I am going now," said Amy, loudly, yet in an agony, lest Mr. Mounsey should hear her voice upstairs.

"Going, d'ye say, and without y'r dinner? Nonsense, nonsense, in a storm like this. Why, Mr. Manners wouldn't tell what to think. No, honey, sit down;" and she rubbed a wooden chair as she spoke, and placed it in the front of the fire for Amy's accommodation.

"Ay, I mind Mr. Mounsey well," went on the old woman, "when he was a bit lawyer's clerk; but he'll be gone soon now, and then ye'll have your crack with y'r brother. You'll be going back to Narbrough th' night, will ye? If not, I can put ye up. I've known Mr. Manners these five years now, come May, and a pleasanter gentle-

man to have there's not in Oldcastle, I'll be bound."

"I will come back," said Amy, in despair—"back, do you hear? *back*, but I want to go now. I've a message to give a little way off."

"A message—gan' on a message, d'ye say? Why, it's pouring cats and dogs, and I've a bit touch of rheumatism; but if ye really want a message taken, well——"

"I will go," screamed Amy.

"Couldn't think of it," said Mrs. Carr, determinately. "Couldn't, Miss Manners. No, if ye want a message taken, I'll gan'. Where's it to?" and she took out her tartan shawl from the drawers, and her bonnet off its peg, as she spoke.

"Will you open the yard door?" said Amy, "it's so hot."

"Very well, Miss Manners," replied Mrs. Carr, who was beginning to think her guest a little unreasonable.

"I'll soon be back," screamed Amy again into her ear, and the next minute darted past her out of the back door, and down the back street into the pouring rain, as fast as ever her feet could carry her, leaving old Mrs. Carr standing gazing after her in speechless amazement.

"She's daft, clean daft," muttered the old lady. "I'd better let him know. Ay dear, was there

ever sich work? and oh! what an awful flash—oh!—oh!”

“Mr. Manners,” said she, rapping at the parlour door, as soon as she dare open her eyes again, and venture upstairs, “can I speak to ye?”

“Ah, Mrs. Carr,” said Mr. Mounsey, who was sitting drinking sherry and soda-water; “well, how are you, this fresh weather? Fresh as ever, eh?”

“I’m pretty well, sir,” replied Mrs. Carr, stiffly. Her husband had not “got on;” but, for all that, she remembered the day when she rather looked down on Mr. Mounsey. “May I speak to you, sir?” she added, addressing her lodger.

“Yes,” answered George, nervously, coming out into the passage, and closing the door behind him. “What is it, Mrs. Carr?”

“She’s gone, sir,” said Mrs. Carr; “the young lady. She’s run out of the back door.”

“Gone!” said George, angrily, and anxiously. “Why did you let her go, Mrs. Carr?”

“She would go, sir,” answered Mrs. Carr; nothing would serve her else. She said she would come back.”

“Which way did she go?” asked George.

“Down the back lane, like a flash o’ lightning. Oh, sir, what have we to do?”

“I will go after her,” said George. “Excuse me, Mr. Mounsey, will you, for a few minutes?”

he added, re-opening the door of the sitting-room. "I have got a message I must see after at once."

"In this storm, Manners!" ejaculated Mr. Mounsey. "Can't you wait till it's over?"

"Not a moment," said George, hastily. "Make yourself at home. I will see you soon."

"But about to-night?" said Mr. Mounsey following him to the door. "The ladies will be disappointed if you don't come."

"I will look in, perhaps," cried George, hurrying down the wet street, and looking back for a moment to answer him; and then, uneasy and excited, he hastened on.

"Where had she gone?" he thought. "Where was he to look for her?" and so amid the rain, thunder, and lightning, he went; stopping at last at the first cab-stand, and inquiring of some of the men if a lady had lately taken a cab.

"Yes, one had—a youngish lady," said one of the men; but on George asking what address she had given, he could not tell him.

"It was probably Windsor Street," George told himself; "but I will inquire;" and thither he bent his steps, ringing the bell, when he arrived at the Mounseys, with a very gentle peal.

Luckily the ladies were at dinner, having waited in vain for the master of the establishment, and were dining in a back room, as they expected some

friends in the evening, and supper was being laid in the dining-room, therefore they did not see George pass.

The door was opened by John, who acted alike footman and coachman, as occasion required, and in a forced, quick, nervous voice, George asked—

“Has Miss Williams come in, John? The children’s governess?”

“Yes, sir,” replied John; “about ten minutes ago, sir; drenched through. She came home in a cab.”

“Oh, very well,” answered George, in a relieved voice. “I—I saw her out, and wondered how she would get home; so I thought I would call. I was afraid she would get wet. Thank you, John—and John”—and here he pushed half a sovereign into the man’s hand—“don’t you say I called to ask; you see, ladies don’t like gentlemen inquiring after their governesses,” and George blushed scarlet, as he said this, and was ashamed to look into the man’s face.

“All right, sir,” answered John, touching his forelock, and giving a look with his eye, which George luckily did not see, or he would have been strongly tempted to knock him down. “She’s an uncommon pretty young woman, sir, Miss Williams, and—why, if you’ve any bit notes, or anything, I’m your man. The mistress wont be the wiser;” and John winked his eye again.

"Very well," said George, with a faint little laugh, and feeling very uncomfortable—"very well, John, I wont forget;" and, nodding his head, he left the door, and took the first cab he could pick up, and returned to his lodgings in anything but a placid state of mind.

"There's that tiresome beggar still," he groaned, as he saw the top of Mr. Mounsey's pepper-and-salt head above the blind. "How on earth am I to get rid of him?"

But, luckily, Mr. Mounsey was under orders—luckily Mr. Mounsey had a wholesome terror of the lady who was his wife; and as their friends were expected early that evening, Mr. Mounsey was also expected to be at home in time to put out the wine, and to be ready dressed to receive their guests; so, on seeing George return, he glanced at his watch, and took advantage of his cab.

"Well, Manners, have you got back?" he said, coming to the door; for though exceedingly loth to leave the sherry and soda-water, he yet felt he must do what was expected. "Stop the cab, my good fellow. I must think of trotting, for mamma will be a little fidgety till I get back—just a little fidgety, as ladies will be. Ha, ha, ha, Manners, you have all that to come to—well, I suppose they all are."

George laughed uneasily.

"It's a remarkable thing," went on Mr. Mounsey—"a remarkable fact about women, Manners—that they never are quite satisfied. Ah, well, they get it from Mother Eve, I suppose," he added, meditatively—"a little curious and dissatisfied, the best of them. I've had a good deal of experience and——"

"Shall I tell the cabman to wait?" said George, impatiently; in fact, he was thoroughly tired of Mr. Mounsey.

"I must go!—I must go!" he answered. "By-the-bye, Manners, we will see you again at *sharp eight*, remember;" and then Mr. Mounsey got into the cab, and was driven away, kissing his fat hand as he went; and so George was left to his reflections.





CHAPTER XIV.

AN INVITATION.

THEY were very bitter ones. He had seen Amy Williams again, and where had been the indifference and contempt which he had persuaded himself he had attained? He knew the truth now as he sat there in that hot, dull room—knew he loved her still, and he groaned aloud when he remembered that she herself had confessed that her motive in concealing her previous life from him had been—that she knew it would part them.

Yet the wretched drudgery of her present lot; her worn looks; her despairing face, and but too evident delicate health—he thought of all these, and pity, great pity for her position began to rise in his heart; and finally he determined to see his cousin Sir Hugh.

“If it is true Hugh has been nothing to her, he will tell me what he knows. Poor girl!—poor girl!” he thought, and got up and wandered restlessly about the little room, and looked at the chair

on which she had so lately sat, and thought of her—and a little also of Laura Clayton.

“I go there too much,” he reflected. “Laura is a charming girl; but I have no heart to give her—that’s about the truth—and perhaps I’ve been seeming as if I had. She’s a noble, perfect woman; any man could love her, and I wish I did.”

He had promised to go to the Mounseys that night, but under the influence of these feelings he made up his mind to send an apology; yet when the time came the note was still unwritten, and unwillingly, but drawn by a sort of attraction he could not resist, at last he went.

He found quite a party assembled when he entered the drawing-room, and Laura in white muslin, and some natural roses, looking more lovely than ever. She was engaged in playing a round game with nearly a dozen little children, for they had suddenly in the afternoon remembered it was Johnny’s birthday, and a juvenile party had been hastily gathered together to celebrate the event.

“What a fearful storm we have had,” said Mrs. Mounsey, rising to receive him; but Laura only smiled and nodded, and went on with her occupation; which, however, was speedily interrupted by the entrance of John with trays of ices and jellies, which the youngsters eagerly seized upon, assisted by Laura, George, and Mr. Peel,

who kept saying, "Now, young people!—now, young people——!" But young people had never been in his way, and he felt rather lost amid a lot of noisy, excited children, but meekly carried about the jellies, as Miss Laura bid him.

"We intend having a little dance after supper," whispered Mrs. Mounsey, confidentially, into George's ear. "Was it not horrid of us, forgetting our little Johnny's birthday till the very last? I am sure I do not know what has come over me of late; and oh! you naughty, naughty man, to keep my husband away so long this afternoon. I am really very angry with you."

"It was the storm," said George, smiling.

"Well, it was frightful. However, luckily, it only lasted a short time. But would you kindly ring the bell? Thanks. John, ask Miss Williams if she is ready to come down and play for the children to dance to. Is it not tiresome?" she continued, again addressing George. "My governess, of all days in the year, asked to go out this afternoon, and we never remembered about the birthday till she was gone. Luckily she got caught in the rain, and came back with some story or other of having a dreadful headache; but she's a person who always has some ache or other, so I desired her to get ready and come down and play for the children."

"My mother thought very highly of Miss Williams," said George, repressing his indignation.

"Indeed! Well, I daresay she's well enough; but do you know, I fancy she's in a consumption. She has a horrid cough, and pants when she goes upstairs, and seems to have no spirits for anything."

"My poor girl!—my poor girl!" thought George Manners.

"They're all nuisances, governesses, I think," went on Mrs. Mounsey; but just at that minute the door opened, and Miss Williams entered, and passed close beside them.

"Well, Miss Williams, how is your head?" said Mrs. Mounsey, patronizingly.

"It is just the same," she answered, in a low voice, and she lifted up her eyes as she spoke, and saw George, and, after a moment's hesitation, slightly bowed.

But he, disgusted with what he had just been listening to, stepped forward and held out his hand.

"How are you, Miss Williams?" he said. "Have you heard lately from my mother?" And on her timidly answering in the affirmative, he followed her to the piano, and opened it for her, saying as he did so, in an under tone—"You are unfit for this work, totally unfit."

"Never mind," she answered, and she smiled, "it will be the sooner over, you know."

"Do not talk in that way," said George, and he glanced hastily round to see if any one was observing them, and caught the eyes of both Mrs. Mounsey and Laura Clayton looking their way, as he did so; but they were out of earshot, so he continued—"But why did you run away as you did? You terrified old Mrs. Carr, and I went out to seek you."

"In the rain! That was very kind."

"Very."

"I took a cab, and got back as quickly as I could—I could not stay there——"

"Will you begin, Miss Williams, now," said Mrs. Mounsey, reprovingly, behind them. "The children are forming the set; and you, sir"—and she tapped George playfully with her fan on his shoulder as she spoke—"you get a partner for the first quadrille."

"It is too hot, Mrs. Mounsey," replied George.

"Nonsense, nonsense; I won't hear of such idleness. No, who will you have? There are several ladies disengaged for you to choose from, my unworthy self among the number," and Mrs. Mounsey laughed.

"Of course, if Mrs. Mounsey will honour me," said George, offering his arm; and Mrs. Mounsey

took it, and they moved into their place, and Amy Williams began her quadrille.

"Do you know, I want you really to tell me something?" said Mrs. Mounsey; "is there, or was there ever anything against Miss Williams? I mean have you ever heard anything?"

"I do not even understand you," answered George, coldly.

"Oh, I mean had Mrs. Manners any reason for her leaving? Laura fancies there was something—some hidden motive; and she looks so lackadaisical, as if something were preying on her mind."

"I am sure I cannot tell."

"I thought you might know. There is Mr. Peel doing the agreeable to Laura. Don't you think that will be a very good thing?"

"Do you mean——" and George paused, really surprised.

"I mean Newforth Hall is not to be despised," said Mrs. Mounsey, laughing; "I mean I consider Laura a very fortunate girl if Mr. Peel proposes for her, and I certainly think he means it."

"Why, he is so old;" and George looked at the blooming Laura, fresh as the roses she wore, and then at the respectable old gentleman, who was industriously performing his steps by her side.

"But what is that?" answered Mrs. Mounsey.

"Girls without money now-a-days must marry where it is ; and Mr. Peel is what they call a very worthy man, and is most delightfully rich."

"I need not have distressed myself about trifling with her feelings," thought George, with a shade of bitterness.

"I must congratulate Miss Clayton," he said, rather satirically.

"Oh, indeed, you must not—not for the world. They are not engaged yet you know ; but Laura means to take him, and I think there is no doubt he will offer. But don't say anything, of course—this is quite between ourselves."

As soon as the dance was ended George left Mrs. Mounsey, and went over to one of the open windows and stood there ; Miss Williams was still sitting on the music-stool. Her face was flushed, and her eyes were bright, but this did not conceal the hollowness of her cheeks, or the unmistakable delicacy which her whole appearance indicated. She was tired and hot, but presently a waltz was called for, and Miss Williams was desired to play it ; but after it was done George crossed over to the piano, taking a glass of wine for her in his hand.

"I am afraid you are very tired," he said almost in the old kind tones, and Amy Williams heard them, and smiled as she answered.

"I daresay you remember the old tunes?" she said.

"Yes," answered George, and then he sighed.

"Your mother asked me to go down to Narbrough for my holidays," went on Amy.

"Well, are you going?"

"Would you be angry?" she asked, meekly.

He hesitated for a moment, and then answered, "No—go by all means, the change will do you good; you do not look strong."

"I am not; but tell me about the children. How is Milly?"

"Like you, not very flourishing, I fear. My mother is uneasy about her, and they tell me——"

"What?"

"That she frets after you. You must go and see them all—and take care of yourself."

But Amy only shook her head, and then Laura Clayton came up to them.

"I am glad to see you have brought Miss Williams some wine, Mr. Manners," she said; "I have come to offer to take her place for the next set. The children want the Lancers."

"Will you dance them with me?" asked George, turning to Miss Williams.

"I should rather not," she answered; and then she moved away, and George remained beside Laura.

"How pretty Miss Williams looks to-night," she said; "I think her very pretty."

"Yes."

"You probably knew her well at Narbrough?" continued Laura; "Oh no—it was your cousin I think she said she knew the best."

"Yes; she had met him before."

"So she told me; Sir Hugh is a dangerous man, I hear; our little governess must take care of her heart."

"All women can do that pretty well, can't they?" said George.

"Not always," answered Miss Clayton; and she gave a very soft, low sigh, and George's face flushed uneasily as she did so.

"We poor beggars never need be afraid, at any rate," he said, the next minute; "no one breaks their hearts for us. Now, a rich young man like Mr. Peel——"

It was Laura's turn to blush now, and she did so over her white throat and down to her white neck.

"He is a very worthy man," she answered.

"Very!" said George. "He has—how many thousands a year, Miss Clayton. By Jove! I wish I was a worthy man too."

"Don't be satirical, Mr. Manners," said Miss Clayton; "and I must tell you this said worthy

man is contemplating a fête, or something to that effect, and if you are so disagreeable I shall tell him not to invite you—though already your name figures on his list.”

“He is very good, I’m sure.”

“He is,” laughed Laura, lightly, and then she added—“but you must really go. The children are to be asked, and Miss Williams, and we are to have no end of good things, and dancing, and I know not what.”

“Well, when has this wonderful affair to come off, then?”

“In a week. Mr. Peel will have everything so smart, he declares it will take that time to get ready. He is going to ask the Colonel of the new regiment for their band, so we will have plenty of military to enliven us, as I suppose the officers will go.”

“That will be charming.”

“Of course,” answered Laura, coquettishly.

“And Miss Clayton will be the belle also, of course,” said George, in the same tone.

“Miss Clayton does not aspire to that distinction,” she replied, more gravely. “No, Mr. Manners, a few years ago it might have been different; now I hope I am a wiser, if not a better woman.”

“Has Laura told you our news?” said Mrs. Mounsey, approaching them. “Mr. Peel is going

to give a fête this day week, in his lovely grounds at Newforth. Isn't it delightful? And we are to have the new regiment, and—oh, Mr. Manners, there is one thing I've been just thinking of—couldn't you ask any friend? I am sure Mr. Peel would be glad to see any friend of yours. Suppose you invite your cousin Sir Hugh Manners to stay with you, and bring him?"

"I am not even asked myself yet," replied George, evasively.

"Oh, but you are. Here is Mr. Peel. Mr. Peel, I've been telling our friend Mr. Manners about your delightful intentions, and saying I am sure you would be glad also to see his cousin Sir Hugh?"

Mr. Peel gave a bow, with his stiffly-cut, white head, and said—

"Mr. Manners, it will give me great pleasure and honour to see Sir Hugh Manners at my humble abode. I, as you know, sir, was not always in the position I am now; but I say, rise to your fortune—that's my motto; and all I can say is, if Sir Hugh Manners, a baronet of ancient birth and distinguished family, will become my guest, I shall be very happy and proud to see him."

"I do not even know that my cousin is in Northumberland," said George; "but if he is I will convey your kind invitation to him."

"Oh yes, he is, Mr. Manners," said Laura Clay-

ton, who was also not without her small ambition. "You know," she continued, with a little nod, "who told me."

"I will hear, at all events," answered George, "when I go down."

"And Mrs. Mounsey," continued Mr. Peel, "I trust you will permit that very pretty and interesting young lady, who I think has the charge of your young people at present, to accompany your party to Newforth Hall on the day of my fête? I have been much struck with her modest and pleasing appearance this evening."

"We will see—we will see, Mr Peel," answered Mrs. Mounsey. "We must not fill your rooms all with one party."

"I think there is not much fear of that," he replied, with considerable pride in his tone. "My dining-room, madam, is sixty feet in length and thirty wide, and my drawing-room to correspond; to say nothing of the inner room—the boudoir, my architect called it. No, we can accommodate you all, Mrs. Mounsey, and I shall trust to see Miss Williams."

"Oh yes, Louisa," said Laura Clayton, and though rather displeased at the idea, Mrs. Mounsey yielded.

"Come, let us have another dance," she said. "Where is Miss Williams? I want her to play."

I don't see her. She certainly has not left the room, has she?"

She had not—she was only leaning behind the curtains against one of the windows, looking out into the wet, dark street, and Mr. Peel, in his slow way, pointed her out.

"I saw the young lady in the end window as I passed a few minutes ago," he said. "Shall I go and ask her to play?"

"Yes do," replied Mrs. Mounsey; and she added, significantly, in a low tone to her sister, as the old gentleman turned away, "you had better look to your conquest, Laura."

For a moment Laura glanced after him, and then, with a smile, she said to George Manners—

"Your little friend is turning all the gentlemen's heads, Mr. Manners."

In the meanwhile Mr. Peel was returning with Miss Williams on his arm, and was himself giving her an invitation to his fête.

"I trust I shall have the pleasure of seeing you on the 29th, Miss Williams," he was saying, "at a little party I propose giving on that day in my grounds at Newforth Hall?"

"I am sure you are very good," replied the governess.

"I consider it is you ladies who are good to come," answered Mr. Peel, gallantly; and he added,

as they came up to the group at the piano, "this young lady has also been kind enough to promise to honour me on the 29th;" for, though he was rather a pompous old gentleman, he had a good heart, and he was beginning perhaps to see a little through all Mrs. Mounsey's charming ways.

"I am going to Narbrough at the end of the week," said George to Amy Williams, as he stood beside her a moment before he left, "and I will probably see Hugh Manners."

"Yes," she answered, without embarrassment, looking in his face.

"She has been speaking the truth," thought George Manners. "I believe she has been speaking the truth."

"Shall I tell my mother you will come down during the holidays, then?" he added.

"I should like to do so very much—like to see them all again."

"Very well," said George, holding out his hand to her, "I will tell my mother. Good night, Miss Williams."





CHAPTER XV.

MR. PEEL'S FÊTE.

MR. PEEL had a fine day for his fête. Not an ordinary English summer day, with clouds and sunshine, and a shower occasionally to damp it; but a real blue-skied, shiny day, with a soft fresh wind, and a full moon at night to light the way for the party on their return.

There was really nothing wanting to make the fête everything he could desire. The rich man had spared no expense, and the woods, the flowers, the sky, and the birds, all did their best to help him; and Newforth Hall, lying amid its sloping lawns, and the grand old trees which had dwelt there so long, looked such a paradise, that Mrs. Mounsey piously remarked "she would never wish for a better."

A tent had been erected on the lawn in the front of the house, in which was spread a very sumptuous breakfast or luncheon, to refresh his guests during the day before the banquet in the hall took place, which was to be at seven o'clock; and when the

party from Windsor Street arrived, they found this tent already half-filled with gaily-dressed people, and the regimental band playing, and Mr. Peel saying polite things right and left without intermission.

Miss Williams accompanied them, very much, however, against Mrs. Mounsey's inclinations; but Mr. Peel seemed to look upon it as a matter of course, and George Manners had also mentioned it, for Mrs. Mounsey had invited him to go with them in the carriage.

"You will not have room for me," he had answered, "with three ladies and the children?"

"Oh no, there will only be Laura and me," said Mrs. Mounsey.

"I thought Miss Williams was going," replied George, and Laura Clayton noticed the shade which spread over his face as he spoke.

"Oh yes, of course she is, Louisa; you cannot disappoint her now," said Laura, quickly; and on her sister remonstrating with her in private for saying this, Laura answered—

"Why, Louisa, Mr. Manners and Mr. Peel will think we are jealous of this poor girl, if you don't let her accept an invitation so pointedly given."

"Well, have your own way," said Mrs. Mounsey, sulkily; but, conscious perhaps of the truth of her sister's argument, "only I know I'm about tired

of all her fine airs. I will have an old governess, the next I get. It's absurd seeing gentlemen talking to them as Mr. Manners did to Miss Williams the other night."

"You forget he saw a great deal of her naturally at home."

"Don't be so contradictory, Laura, please," said Mrs. Mounsey; "and remember this, if I let her go to Mr. Peel's, it's the last of such nonsense that I will allow. I don't keep governesses to go out to parties."

So Miss Williams accompanied them, dressed in blue and white muslin, and with a blue and white bonnet to match; and even Mrs. Mounsey was forced mentally to allow that she looked very pretty and ladylike, and was more determined than ever as she sat opposite to her, during their drive to Newforth, that this should be her very last appearance in public.

There was a cloud therefore on Mrs. Mounsey's brow when they drove up Mr. Peel's long avenue; a cloud, however, which speedily vanished when she saw all the fine people already assembled on the lawn and in the tent.

"There are the Greys, absolutely," she whispered to her sister; "and Sir Matthew Johnstone, I declare," she added, with an air of excitement. "How well Mr. Peel gets on; and look, what a

splendid dress Mrs. Fenwicke of Northwell is wearing. How do I look? Has that horrid dust marked my face at all? There is Mr. Peel—he sees us now. Well, Mr. Peel, I congratulate you; this is really charming.”

“And you ladies have come to make it more so,” said Mr. Peel, bowing and handing them out of the carriage. “I do not see my friend Mr. Mounsey—how is that?”

“He is coming with Mr. Mauners,” answered Mrs. Mounsey. “We could not manage any better, you see, as Miss Williams came.”

“I am happy to see Miss Williams,” said the host, with another old-fashioned bow. “And Mr. Manners’s cousin, Sir Hugh Manners, is he going to honour my little fête with his presence?”

“Oh! Mr. Manners is so sorry, but Sir Hugh is in Scotland. He did not see him when he was down at Narbrough on Saturday,” replied Mrs. Mounsey, with an air of extreme intimacy with the Manners family.

“I am sorry,” said Mr. Peel, with another bow; “if, however, Sir Hugh Manners had visited Newforth Hall to-day he would have met one or two of his own rank and acquaintance, I believe. My honourable friend, the county member, Sir Matthew Johnstone, is someway in the grounds; also the Honourable and Rev. Mr. Grey and his lady, and

a few more families with whom Sir Hugh is probably intimate."

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Peel! You have got such *nice* people. It is delightful," said Mrs. Mounsey. "And do tell me which is Colonel Layton, and how many of the new officers have come."

"None, as yet, Mrs. Mounsey; but I am momentarily expecting them," replied Mr. Peel; and his expectations were shortly realized, for a drag containing some half-dozen of the new regiment presently appeared, and Mrs. Mounsey was also gratified by having one or two of them presented to her immediately they arrived.

There was a very good-looking man amongst them, a Mr. O'Tool, an Irishman; and also a youth, with a very long nose, the son of a famous north-country general, whom Mrs. Mounsey speedily led off, on the strength of his historic name, into a kind of semi-flirtation to the tent, where she amused herself and him with a spring chicken and lobster salad, and pretty speeches *ad libitum*.

Laura, soon after they went, commenced playing croquet, and Miss Williams walked about with the children till they ran off and left her also; then she sat down and watched the croquet-players on one of Mr. Peel's highly-ornamental new garden-chairs.

"And who may that pretty gurl be sitting

there?" asked the handsome Irishman, Mr. O'Tool, of Mrs. Mounsey, when she, the ensign, and himself, having refreshed themselves to their hearts' content, came out of the tent and stood looking at the croquet-players also.

"Where? I don't see any one in particular," replied Mrs. Mounsey, looking in an opposite direction to the one which the Irishman had indicated.

"There, to be sure," he answered, in his rich brogue—"there, on the garden-chair in the front."

"Oh, that is a young person I have to teach my children," said Mrs. Mounsey, in a freezing tone.

"Sure she's the prettiest gurl in the place, then," replied Mr. O'Tool, with a glance of his eye at Young Warlock the ensign, to make him understand the fun. "Will ye introduce me, please, Mrs. Mounsey? Perhaps she's not been in to luncheon yet?"

"I—I think, Mr. O'Tool, I would rather not," hesitated Mrs. Mounsey; "but I daresay you are only jesting," she went on, "in expressing this wish. I will gladly introduce you to any of the *young ladies* present. There is Miss Fenwicke, now, of Northwell, a charming girl, who will have 10,000*l.* for her fortune at least, and her father such a beautiful place—or there is my sister——"

"Both charming young ladies, I've no doubt," answered jolly Mr. O'Tool, who was only persisting because he saw it vexed Mrs. Mounsey; "but I've just set me heart on the blue and white muslin, and that's the truth; so will ye favour me?" And he offered his arm, which Mrs. Mounsey was obliged to accept. But she also was determined, and, in crossing the lawn, she opportunely met a lady she knew; so, dropping the Irishman, she entered into a lively conversation with her friend, and Mr. O'Tool was compelled to walk on.

"But I wont be done though by the jealous old fool," was his mental reflection as he did so, and accordingly he went up to his host and requested an introduction "to the pretty gurl in blue and white."

"Certainly, sir," replied Mr. Peel. "That is Miss Williams, a very interesting and ladylike young person, who I fear the misfortunes of her family must have compelled to accept the position of governess to the children of the lady you have already been introduced to, Mrs. Mounsey."

"Yes, I know," said Mr. O'Tool. "She's no worse for that in my eyes. Mrs. Mounsey took good care to inform me who she was; but, deuce take it, Mr. Peel, why shouldn't a pretty gurl have her luncheon, and a bit of fun too into the bargain, because her father happened to be unfor-

tunate? Faith, me own was for that matter; yet I think meself as good a gentleman as evir. One can't help these little accidents."

"No," replied the rich man, pompously; for naturally perhaps he had not much sympathy with failure.

But he introduced the Irishman, who in the most perfectly easy and pleasant manner sat down by the pretty governess and began to make himself very agreeable, and five minutes afterwards Mrs. Mounsey's sharp eyes saw her rise, take his arm, and disappear with him into the tent.

"A nice way of looking after her charges, I am sure!" thought the angry lady; "but I knew how it would be with Laura's folly."

Just about then George Manners and Mr. Mounsey arrived, and Mrs. Mounsey happened to be standing alone with a very flushed face when they came up.

"Ah, mamma, you here!—and where is the rest of the party?" said Mr. Mounsey. "How is it you are alone?"

"Laura is playing croquet, and the children are looking at some show or other at the back of the tent, which Mr. Peel has had put up for them; and their governess, instead of being with them, as she ought to be, looking after them, is flirting violently in the tent with one of the new officers—a Mr.

O'Tool!" answered Mrs. Mounsey, pleased at all events to have the opportunity of giving this explanation before George. "But how hot it is standing here, Mr. Manners!" she continued. "Would you give me your arm? I think I should like to go into the tent and have some claret-cup. It's delicious—so cooling! Will you come, too, papa?"

When George Manners entered the spacious tent he looked eagerly round, and certainly in a distant corner of it was a picture which partly at least justified Mrs. Mounsey's description of her governess's occupation; for, leaning back, looking flushed and pretty, was Amy Williams, while Mr. O'Tool was bending eagerly over her, and evidently doing his best to make himself agreeable.

Yet George had no real cause for the jealous throb which darted into his heart, or the frown which contracted his forehead. Mr. O'Tool was only talking the most commonplace nonsense, and Amy Williams merely politely listening to him; but they were sitting apart, and it looked like a flirtation, and both George and Mrs. Mounsey felt in a rage at the sight.

"How disgustingly Miss Williams is going on," said Mrs. Mounsey; "it is really ridiculous bringing such people into society; men just amuse themselves with them—a low class of men, I mean."

"Come, come, mamma, don't be too hard," said her husband, anxious to make peace; "remember you had your young days, too."

Poor Mr. Mounsey, he had never made such a mistake in his life.

"My young days, Mr. Mounsey!" repeated the lady, turning absolutely scarlet as she spoke. "I like that; yes, I had my young days, and I *have* my young days still, I hope—younger days I should think than that faded, die-away creature, who is painted up to her eyes to-day for the occasion. My young days indeed! Marrying a man twice one's own age doesn't make one old, does it, Mr. Manners?"

"I really do not know," answered George, thoroughly disgusted with the world in general.

"Will you desire her to come here, Mr. Mounsey?" went on Mrs. Mounsey, "and I will send her to look after the children. She has neglected her duties long enough."

"My dear, I cannot—really—go up, when she is with a strange gentleman—and a military man, too," faltered Mr. Mounsey.

"Well, if you are such a fool, I will," answered Mrs. Mounsey, forgetting everything in her anger; and accordingly she walked down the tent in her splendid mauve satin, and on reaching her governess addressed her with the scantiest of ceremony.

"Miss Williams, will you go and look after the children at once?" she said, "and keep them beside you in future pray."

"Oh, I'll do that," said Mr. O'Tool, rising. "What are they like—like their charming mamma, eh? I think I'll soon spot them, then."

"Oh, you Irishmen are such flatterers," said Mrs. Mounsey, smoothing her ruffled plumes.

"It's you makes us so, then," answered the handsome lieutenant, with a bold look in his wild grey eyes; "how can a fellow help saying what he thinks—sometimes? Ye've yourself to blame, Mrs. Mounsey."

"Well, Miss Williams better go, I think. I am getting uneasy about them," answered Mrs. Mounsey, smiling.

"Suppose we all go?" said the politic Mr. O'Tool, who did not want to lose sight of the blue and white muslin; "suppose we all go and seek the dear little darlings, for I really want to see them. Looking at Punch and Judy did ye say, Mrs. Mounsey? Why, there's nothing I like so well. By Jove! it always makes a boy of me again; so do let us seek them."

"Well, come up here then, and I will tell my husband where I am going," replied Mrs. Mounsey, taking the Irishman's arm; and the three then ad-

vanced towards the gentlemen at the other end of the tent.

Amy Williams looked at George, and bowed timidly as they approached, but he showed at once his affection and jealousy for her by a slight and very distant acknowledgment.

"What *can* be the matter?" she wondered, for she was perfectly innocent of flirting with Mr. O'Tool, and had seen George once since his return from Narbrough, when his manner had been very different.

"What, it is any one," thought George, scowling over his plate—"any fool who chooses to say a civil word to her; when she knows how anxious I have been, too—how much I have suffered." So he did not rise when the object of the party was explained, or offer to join them when they went away; but sat on cursing his fate, and swearing mentally at everything, till the croquet-players, and among them Laura Clayton, came in to partake of some of Mr. Peel's luxuries, and to cool their excited tempers with his iced champagne.

"You have come at last, then?" said Laura Clayton, pausing, and holding out her hand to him, while the other players passed on, with a very cordial welcome. "I have been looking for you. Is it not a lovely day?"

"Yes, very," answered George, rising; "and are you enjoying yourself?"

Laura shrugged her lovely shoulders.

"Oh, of course," she said. "I have been playing for the last hour at croquet with the very worst partner in the world."

"And have tired and vexed yourself, of course. Come and sit here, and let me carve you some chicken, and get you some champagne. Your sister and Mr. Mounsey have gone to seek the children."

"And where is Miss Williams? Have you seen her? We should not neglect her, as we brought her."

"She is with them."

"Oh, then it's all right;" and Laura settled herself to enjoy her luncheon and Mr. Manners's society.

They sat there more than an hour—sat till one after the other the occupants of the tent disappeared, and they were left almost alone. And never had Laura been so brilliant, never so charming, and angry and depressed as George felt, he could not fail to admire his companion; and when at last they went out together to stroll among the lovely flower-beds, and under the beautiful old trees, which acted as a complete shelter from the sun, George again encountered Amy Williams and Mr. O'Tool.

"There is Miss Williams," said Laura, kindly; "let us go and speak to her;" for something in George's manner that afternoon had made her feel very happy, and the owner of all the grandeur which surrounded them was looking rather disconsolately at the tall, handsome man, who was so persistently escorting the lady he intended for his future wife.

"Oh, she's very happy, I daresay. Don't you see how well she's engaged?" answered George, with affected carelessness.

"Well, perhaps," replied Laura Clayton; and she looked up in George's face and smiled.

"And so are we, are we not?" he said. "Come and walk under the trees;" and he led Laura away, and talked to her, and said things which perhaps he ought not; and Amy Williams saw this—saw his evident attentions to Miss Clayton—and Mr. O'Tool began to wonder what made the little governess grow so wonderfully lively all at once. "But faith, I suppose it's being out of the clutches of that jealous old harridan for a little while, and with your humble servant," thought the complacent soldier.

The "jealous harridan" had been happily disposed of, by Mr. Peel introducing her to the Colonel of the new regiment—a very meek and quiet little man, who had gone through the Crimean

war, and broiled a dozen years in India, with the greatest distinction, and yet was the shyest, civilest, and most modest man amongst ladies that you could conceive. So he was listening to Mrs. Mounsey, and replying to her occasionally, and walking up and down the grounds with her, and would have done so to the day's end, before he would have had the courage to free himself; whilst she, contented with being with the officer highest in rank, was compelled to leave Miss Williams to take care of herself, and thus Mr. O'Tool, nothing loth, was almost the whole day with "the pretty bit of blue and white muslin," as he described Miss Williams on many subsequent occasions.

"Ye'll go into dinner with me, wont ye?" he said, very sentimentally, during the afternoon. "Sure, I haven't had such a jolly day as this since I was a choild in Ireland. Ah, if I wasn't such a poor devil, Miss Williams."

"What difference could that make?" she answered, laughing.

"It moight," said Mr. O'Tool; and he sighed, but did not commit himself further, but contrived to make a very good dinner when they sat together during that sumptuous repast.

After dinner was over the ladies wandered through the beautiful house, and admired Mr. Peel's splendid furniture, and had little conver-

sations together, as best pleased them; and Mrs. Mounsey took this opportunity to whisper a word of advice in her sister's ear.

"You will lose all this, Laura, if you don't take care," she said. "It's absurd the way you have been flirting with Mr. Manners;" but Laura made no answer, only sighed, and impatiently shook her head; and by-and-by she asked Miss Williams to go with her a little stroll during the cool of the evening.

"They will be dancing presently, I suppose," she said; "and the flowers will look so lovely with the dew on them. Come and take a turn before the gentlemen join us."

"There is no doubt it is a lovely place, is it not?" she went on, as they walked among the fragrant beds. "What would you say, Miss Williams," she continued, smiling, "if it were offered to you?"

"It would depend so much on circumstances, that I do not know," answered the governess.

"Most girls would let no circumstances allow them to refuse it, I believe," said Laura; "but I do not think, as many do, that riches alone constitute happiness."

"No, indeed."

"Yet we must think of these things, and most of all, in giving our affections, we ought to do so if

we were but wise ; but talking of this, reminds me I meant to give you a word of advice. Don't fall in love with that handsome soldier who seems so bent on making you do so. It's a way military men have from which often great misery arises. You are not offended with me, I hope, for saying this ?"

"Oh no ! Why should I ? But you need not be afraid. I would have been alone all day unless Mr. O'Tool had taken compassion on me ; that is his only attraction."

"Nay, now ; he is a very fine-looking man, and evidently admires you ; but officers flirt wherever they go, I think, and then they leave the place, and forget the last love in a newer one ; and besides that, you never can know their previous histories or connexions. I am sure in our own family we have a terrible example of this."

"Have you some relations in the army ?"

"My cousin, Hugh Clayton, is a captain in the 3rd regiment, and he married some young lady he met at Westport, after a very short acquaintance, and without the knowledge of his own people, who knew he had lived at any rate for some time with an unfortunate Irish girl. But he forsook her, as I said, and married this Miss Barritt, and went out to India with her, and about a year after a terrible scandal ensued. The regiment was at

Calcutta, I think, when this other woman, who had followed him from England, cast up, and claimed to be Hugh's wife, and you can imagine the scenes which followed. At all events, the poor young creature, who had hitherto believed herself to be his wife—terrified, I suppose, at her position, and believing in the first marriage—fled one night from my cousin's house; and though he has sought her everywhere since, and spent hundreds in the search, she has never been heard of. I fear greatly myself her misery has driven her to self-destruction."

It was growing dark, and Miss Clayton never noticed the grey shade which spread over her companion's face during this narrative.

"Poor Hugh," she went on, "he might have turned out such a different and much happier man. I knew him well once, for I lived some time with my uncle; but it is years since we have met—but it will not be long now. My sister heard from him this morning, and he is coming down to Scotland to follow out some trace of his poor young wife which he has discovered lately, and he will stay with us a few days on his way."

A cold dew broke out on Amy Williams's face as Miss Clayton said these words, and she suddenly grasped the back of an iron garden-chair which they were passing.

"Are you tired?" said Miss Clayton, noticing this action, and looking at her. "How pale you have suddenly grown. Let us sit down. Do you feel faint?"

"I am subject to these attacks—it will go off," faltered Miss Williams.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I fear the long, hot day has been too much for you; but we will sit quiet, and, as you say, it will pass off."

"When do you expect your cousin?" asked Amy Williams, a few moments afterwards, in a low, husky voice.

"He may come to-morrow, or perhaps the next day," answered Miss Clayton. "Poor Hugh, I shall be glad to see him again, though I hear he is greatly altered. But here are some of the gentlemen—Mr. Peel himself, I declare. Well, Mr. Peel, I have never yet been near you to congratulate you, as you have been so much engaged with your guests; but you must allow me to do so now. Your party has been a most complete success."

"I am truly glad you think so, Miss Clayton," replied their host; "but I have scarcely seen you. Mr. Manners has been the happy man to-day."

"Mr. Manners had not a hundred people to entertain, Mr. Peel, you see," said Miss Clayton, pleasantly; "which makes all the difference."

"Will you favour me by taking a little stroll

with me now, then?" asked Mr. Peel. "Do pray take my arm. I should like you to see a new orchid which I have just procured in the west conservatory."

"But I do not like to leave Miss Williams; she has not been very well this evening," replied Laura.

"Perhaps Miss Williams will accompany us?" said Mr. Peel.

"No, no, Miss Clayton," said Miss Williams; "do go. I am better now, the air is reviving me. I feel much better—I hope you will go."

"For a few minutes at any rate," urged Mr. Peel; and so Miss Laura, rather alarmed at the prospect of the tête-à-tête before her, walked away on the old gentleman's arm—and, silent, horror-stricken, and cold, Amy Williams sat on alone.

"What should she do? What should she do?" she thought. "Where go and hide herself now? Where shelter herself from Hugh Clayton's anger—or worse, more terrible love?"

Presently it grew dark, and she saw the lights in the hall, and the lights in the conservatories, and heard the sound of music and dancing; but still forgotten, she sat there. Laura Clayton was too busy with her own affairs ever to remember her, and the Irishman, after looking for her in vain, had got another pretty partner; and only George

Manners wondered where she was—only George Manners thought of her among all that smiling crowd.

After dancing with Laura Clayton he came out into the still and silent garden, and was going down one of the more retired walks, when he heard footsteps behind him, and, looking round in the dim light, he recognised Amy Williams.

"George! George!" she cried, in so changed a voice he almost started; "George, I saw you go past. I want you—I want to speak to you;" and she held out her hands.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "For God's sake, tell me what is the matter? What makes you look like this? Why are you trembling so? Has any one frightened you?"

"Take me away, George," she went on, in the same strange, husky tones in which she had first addressed him, and clinging to his arm as she spoke. "Take me away—hide me any way you like—but do not leave me now."

"What is it, Amy?" said George, soothingly. "Tell me what is the matter?"

"You said you loved me once," she continued, "oh, save me now—oh! George, save me, save me from that dreadful man!" and she shuddered, and grasped his arm tighter in unmistakeable terror.

"What man?" asked George Manners, sternly. "What do you mean? Is it Hugh Manners?"

"No, no, no—you must know all now. George, for the love I have borne you I have deceived you, and Hugh Manners knew it, that was all. I could not bear to part with you, and I knew this would, if I told you; but I fear—I fear I am the wife of another man—of Captain Clayton;" and she looked up with her eyes full of dread into his face as she spoke, but all thought of her own safety died away at what she read there.

"Oh! forgive me," she cried, falling at his feet, and flinging her arms round his knees. "Oh! forgive me, my dear, dear George. I loved you so much. Oh! George, don't look at me like that—don't look as if you hated me now!"

"The wife of another man!" said George, slowly. "Take away your arms, Amy Williams; let me understand—what is it you say? What, Captain Clayton do you mean?"

"He is their cousin—Miss Clayton's cousin," answered Amy, shuddering, and still clinging to his knees. "But don't judge me harshly, I have had some excuse."

"I believed Hugh Manners had cast you off," answered George, with great bitterness, "and I pitied you, but I have none now. Why have you

brought this sin upon me ? What motive had you for this vile deception ?”

“ Wait,” said she, rising, “ wait till you hear. Let us sit down, George, and I will tell you all.”





CHAPTER XVI.

FLIGHT.

SO the same sad story which had been told to Sir Hugh on the lonely shores of Narbrough, was now repeated in Mr. Peel's dim, dark garden to his cousin.

Once during the narrative a groan broke from George's pale lips; and as Amy went on entreating him to pardon her, telling him how it was for the love which she bore him that she had deceived him, he suddenly clasped her to his breast, murmuring in husky tones of passionate pain, "Oh! my God, what shall I do!—what shall I do!"

"Only don't leave me," pleaded the unhappy woman, clinging to him; "only don't leave me to meet that dreadful man."

"Child! child!" cried George, rising and pushing her sharply away from him, while love, anger, honour, and despair fought their battle in his heart. "Why did we ever meet—why did we ever meet!"

"Say you forgive me?" said Amy again. "Say, George, you forgive me once?"

Then he came back to her, holding out his hands to her, and looking at her with eyes full of infinite pain.

"Amy," he said, "truly have I loved you; I would have taken you to my breast when I knew you had a secret which no wife should have, and have sheltered you and toiled for you, so God is my witness. But now, now——" and he sank down once more on the seat, and covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud.

"Oh! George, don't—don't grieve thus," said Amy, going to him, and laying her hand on his shoulder.

"To think it has been all sin and shame," murmured George; "all—all—oh! what have I done?—what have I done that this should have come upon me?"

"You have done nothing, dear George," said Amy. "It is all my blame—all my foolish love; you knew nothing, and I feared it would part us if you did; and though Sir Hugh urged me to tell you——"

"It was kind of Hugh," said poor George, "very kind."

"He has always been so since he knew the truth; he is fond of you, I think, George."

"And what will you do now?" asked George, lifting up his head, after a few moments of painful silence.

"I—I do not know. When Miss Clayton told me this man was her cousin, I was just stunned at first; I could not think, then I remembered you. I thought I will go to George, and he will help me."

George gave a bitter sigh.

"God help us!" he murmured, "God help us!"

Presently he rose again, and began pacing restlessly backwards and forwards in front of the seat.

"Would you go to my mother?" he said, at last, stopping abruptly, and addressing Amy.

"Yes—but perhaps Mrs. Manners——" and Amy paused.

"I have been trying to think what would be best for you," went on George, "and I think you would be safest and best with her."

"You are very good," said Amy, weeping; "very, very good."

"No," answered George, gloomily, "no!" and then, as he stood looking at her, pity for her misery, and the softening memory that she had erred through love, grew in his heart. "Do not let me see you thus," he said, gently; "it will only unman me again, and there are many things to be done and thought of now. When would you like to go?"

"I *must* go to-night," said Amy, recalled to a

sense of her own danger by these words. "I dare not—I will not risk seeing Hugh Clayton. I told you he swore he would kill me if I left him, and Sir Hugh said when he met him in London he looked utterly mad. No, George, take me away," and she rose and put her hands in his—"take me away to-night."

"There is a night train North," said George, "will you go by that? But if you do, what excuse can you make to Mrs. Mounsey?"

"Anything, say anything; that my father is ill—or anything you like."

"Best say what I fear is very near the truth," answered George, "that poor Milly is ill; yes, that will be best," he added, as if he had decided. "Say my mother has sent for us both; that will account for our leaving together. I will go now and see if I can get a carriage to take you to Windsor Street, and there you must write to Mrs. Mounsey, and explain as well as you can. It will never do for you to face her here, agitated as you are now."

"And—and you forgive me?"

George looked at her silently.

"I was so lonely and unhappy," went on Amy.

"But what good could this do?" answered George, with sudden vehemence. "Are men's hearts toys, that you can take them up and toss

them down for your ease and pleasure?—yet, God forgive me,” he continued, “that I should reproach you thus—I at least who am so weak. But I will leave you now;” and he turned away. But the next moment, stung with sudden compassion—for which of us is stern when love for ourselves has caused the wrong?—he came back to her, and put his hand in hers.

“My poor girl,” he said, “my poor, poor girl!” and stooped down and kissed her hair. “Try to compose yourself,” he whispered, “and I will try to act as I should to you in this;” and once more pressing her with his lips he left her, and Amy was alone.

How utterly miserable she felt as she sat there after he was gone. She saw what she had done now—saw how in her blind selfish affection, she had tried to drag a good man down to sin. She had loved George and destroyed his happiness, and all she could do now was to wring her hands over her own weakness, and moan as she repeated his miserable words—the most miserable surely which those who love each other can ever utter: “Oh! why did we ever meet—why did we ever meet.”

He came back to her before long. He had met a hired carriage waiting for some of the guests, close to the entrance of Newforth, and he had engaged it to convey them to Oldcastle.

"Put down your veil, and take my arm," said George, quietly, "and seem as little agitated as you can. We will be in Windsor Street in half an hour, and it wants a quarter to eleven now, and the train starts a little after twelve, so you will have time to write your letter and make your arrangements before we leave."

She obeyed him without a word, and they scarcely spoke during their drive into the town. Once, by accident, Amy touched George's hand, and it was quite cold, and there was a sort of huskiness in his voice, but outwardly he displayed no other signs of emotion; and when the carriage stopped at the Mounseys' door, he spoke in the most commonplace manner to the driver and the servants.

"I have had bad news from home," he said to the housemaid, who opened the door for them; "my little sister is very ill, and wishes to see Miss Williams immediately, and we had not time to find Mrs. Mounsey at Mr. Peel's to tell her, as the telegram came to me there, and we must start by the night train. So will you tell her when she comes home, and will you also kindly go upstairs with Miss Williams and assist her to pack her clothes?"

In half an hour everything was ready—Miss Williams's belongings having been thrust into

boxes by her trembling hands, assisted by the housemaid, while her large trunks, many of which had never been opened, for she had not required much dress in Windsor Street, were carried down by the cook and the carriage-driver; George handsomely rewarding the servants for their trouble.

"I'm sure it just looks as if she was going away for good," said Jane the housemaid, as soon as the door was closed after them. "There's something up, cook, you'll see, and her eyes were that red with crying; perhaps she's running off with Mr. Manners? I shouldn't wonder."

It was past one in the morning when the Mounseys returned in a state of the greatest excitement.

"Has Miss Williams come back, Jane?" asked Mrs. Mounsey, eagerly, the moment they arrived. "I never heard of such a thing! Do you know, when we were coming away, she was nowhere to be found."

"She's come and gone, mam," answered Jane, brimful of her news. "She comed and went with Mr. Manners."

"With Mr. Manners!" exclaimed Laura Clayton.

"Yes, miss. They came together in a carriage, and went off in the same one to the train, for Mr. Manners kept it; and the man helped to carry

down her boxes, for she took all her things; and, mam, she left this note for you," added Jane, handing one to her mistress.

"What does she say, Louisa?" asked Laura, approaching her sister, who was tearing open the letter Miss Williams had left, and her face was very pale as she spoke.

"The coolest thing you ever heard of," answered Mrs. Mounsey, now reading Amy's explanation by the lamp in the hall—"One of my late pupils, Milly Manners, is very ill, and her mother has telegraphed to Mr. Manners to bring me down to Narbrough at once. We had no time to find you at Mr. Peel's to tell you of this, as the little girl is very ill, and the message had been delayed by Mr. Manners being from home, and Mrs. Manners expects us at Narbrough this evening. Under these circumstances, Mr. Manners thought we better go down by the night train, and I trust, therefore, you will excuse me leaving you so hastily;" and with a few more words of apology the letter ended.

"Did you ever hear such impudence?" said Mrs. Mounsey, after she had concluded it. "Going off in that way! Does she mean to come back, I wonder! Well, she shall not, I can tell her that; and not a penny of her wages shall she see either. It is too much really, and giving us all this trouble

too ; but those Mannerses just spoil her—making so much of her, and writing to her, and keeping her up in all sorts of folly ; and I consider it exceedingly rude of Mr. Manners also—he might have found us at Mr. Peel's in a few minutes if he had chosen."

" I do not understand it," answered Laura, in a low, trembling voice. " Will you let me see the letter, Louisa?"

But she could learn nothing from it. There was indeed a postscript on the last page, which Mrs. Mounsey in her indignation had overlooked, which informed them that Mr. Manners would return to Oldcastle to-morrow, when he would call at Windsor Street ; and Laura read this twice, and then returned the letter to her sister.

" She seemed very much put out, like," said Jane.

" And did Mr. Manners say anything?" asked Miss Clayton.

" Only that his little sister was very ill ; and he looked uncommon bad, miss—pale, and set-like about the face—and he handed her in, and they drove away."

" Well, my dear, I—I don't see there's anything in it. Of course, she should have explained—no doubt she should have explained ; but then the little girl is probably dying, and they might have.

no time," said Mr. Mounsey. "Our young friend, Manners, will, I have no doubt, fully satisfy us when he calls to-morrow."

"I'm satisfied with him, at any rate," said Mrs. Mounsey, in a rage. "I think he is a very ungentlemanly person—very! I wish it may be all right between him and this young woman. I do not like the appearance of it at all. But I'll be at the end of it. I'll write to Mrs. Manners to-morrow. I'll——"

"Good night, Louisa," said Laura, "I am tired;" and she took up her candle and went away, but poor Mr. Mounsey had the full benefit of his wife's wounded vanity and ill-temper.

Meanwhile, as the first pale, pink streak of the early summer dawn was appearing in the east, the two who had caused all this excitement were about arriving, pale and jaded, at the station of Narbrough.

Not much had been said during that long, silent journey. They had been together, and alone; together, yet apart—these two who loved each other—whose hearts beat and throbbed with the same strange pain, but whose lives they both knew must now be separate and distinct for ever.

They had travelled nearly an hour, when Amy gave, almost unconsciously, a deep, long sigh; and for a moment George, who was seated by her side,

checked the sympathetic one which rose in answer to it in his own bosom. But the next moment, yielding to an irresistible impulse, he too sighed deeply, and held out his hand to her, and without speaking she put her ungloved one into his.

"You are growing cold," he said, in a low, changed voice, as if he were some one different to the familiar George Manners; and indeed he had been trying hard to be so for the last two dreary hours.

"A little," she answered, and she shivered slightly. Then he stooped down, and put his overcoat round her shoulders, and so they went on, silent and hand in hand, for another hour through the chill night air.

At last George spoke again.

"I think, Amy," he said, in the same cold, gentle tones in which he had first addressed her, "that you had better stay on at Narbrough, if it can be arranged so, and if Captain Clayton leaves without any further discovery."

"Yes, but——"

"You will be happier with my mother and the children than among strangers," went on George, "and I will go abroad."

"Abroad, George!"

"Yes. I have sometimes thought of establishing a branch business at St. Petersburg, and I think I shall go out there now and settle."

"Oh! George, need you go?" and she almost whispered the last three words.

"Yes," he answered, sharply, or at least with more energy than he had spoken since they started. "Yes, I must go, and I will stay. I will come home once a year, and that will be about as much as I shall have strength for."

"And—and," said Amy, vainly endeavouring to suppress her tears, "it is I who have banished you, I who have driven you away. Oh! do not go, George—stay near me to the end."

"Hush, hush," interrupted George, "do not talk so—do not try me too far. See yonder is the dawn breaking," he said, in a few minutes, "how surprised my mother will be. I fear you will be dreadfully tired, as you will have to walk from the station. We will be there now in a quarter of an hour."

When the train stopped at Narbrough, and George was getting out Amy's luggage, a familiar voice greeted them.

"Station master," it said, "is my servant and the trap here?" and Amy looked round and recognised Sir Hugh; and George, coming up a moment later, held out his hand to his cousin.

"You two!" said Sir Hugh, much surprised, looking from one to the other. "Where on earth did you spring from?"

"We got in at Oldcastle, and are going to the Vicarage," answered George; "but how is it we did not see you on the platform?"

"Probably because I was sleeping the profound sleep of the innocent in the carriage, under the influence of a considerable amount of brandy and soda," replied Sir Hugh, with a laugh. "I have travelled all night, and am as stiff as an old chair. But whatever are you coming down in this train for?"

"We will tell you after," said George, quietly; "but forgive me, old fellow," he added, again holding out his hand to Sir Hugh, "forgive me my unjust suspicions."

"What, it's all right between you again, then?" answered Sir Hugh. "No more secrets, Miss Amy, eh? Confound you, George; it was uncommonly jolly, I can tell you, being confidant, &c.; and now you've spoilt it all."

"I daresay," said George, for he saw his cousin was only chaffing.

"But you are not going to walk, surely?" asked Sir Hugh, as they came out of the station, and only his own waggonette was standing waiting. "They know you are coming down, don't they? Where's the trap?"

"They don't know," answered George. "Will you give us a lift, Hugh? and I will tell you as we

go along ;” and in a few words George told Sir Hugh the adventures of the last few hours.

“By Jove ! you’ve done right,” said the baronet, as he concluded. “Shut yourself up, Miss Amy ; hide yourself till the fellow’s gone back to roast himself to death, it’s to be hoped, in India. Her life isn’t safe,” he added, in an undertone to George. “Clayton looks mad—mad as a March hare. I will hear through Donovan, or Lowry, or some of the fellows, about his movements,” he went on again, addressing Amy ; “and till he’s safe out of the country lock your chamber-door and bar your windows, my dear Miss Williams, if you take my advice. But don’t let us talk about it. Don’t look pale over it. Isn’t there the brave George here and my holy and stalwart uncle ready to defend you ?—to say nothing of your very humble servant, myself.”

“If he only does not hear of me at the Mounseys,” said Amy, looking as if she were going to faint.

“He wont, most probably,” answered Sir Hugh ; “and if he does, haven’t you the whole regiment of militia which I have just enumerated at your service ? No, don’t think about it, Miss Amy. Never be on the look-out for misfortunes—deuce take them, they come fast enough without

that. But they don't expect you at the Vicarage, you say?"

"No," answered George, briefly.

"Why not come with me to the Hall, then?" went on Sir Hugh. "You'll find a fire and breakfast ready there at any rate, and it will be a rest for you, Miss Amy, too; and George can go down and face the old lady and explain things a bit, which will make it pleasanter for you."

"What do you say?" said George, looking at Amy.

For a moment she hesitated; then she said, "No, I better go to your mother."

"I think so, too," replied George; "so, Hugh, if you will let us out at the turn, we will walk down the lane."

"Nay, I'll drive you to the house, at any rate, if you wont come with me," said Sir Hugh. "Isn't the Vicar someway over the borders, Johnson?" he added, addressing his servant, who was driving.

"Yes, sir," answered the man; "he and Sir Thomas Lilbourne are fishing down Woodside."

"I thought so. Well, the reverend pastor and master wont be at home to bother you with questions then; all the better for you both, eh? and the good lady isn't very formidable. Here's the old green gate. Good-bye, Miss Amy, for the pre-

sent. I'll be down some time o' day, and hear how you are getting on, and till then——” and Sir Hugh lifted his hat and nodded as the waggonette turned and drove away, and George and Amy were left standing in the early summer dawning at the Vicarage gate.





CHAPTER XVII.

GEORGE'S REQUEST.

QU! George, what shall we say?" she asked, nervously, looking up in his face as he was opening the gate.

"The truth," he answered, with a certain sharpness in his tone, for he was beginning to feel the annoyance of the position, "which is always the best." But the moment after he added more kindly, "This is a peaceful-looking spot, Amy, isn't it? Make it your home if you can."

But she only sighed in reply, and then silently they walked together up the narrow avenue, and crossed the dew-spangled grass in front of the house.

"They'll be all fast asleep, I suppose," said George, commencing vigorously to pull the doorbell.

For a long time, however, this was in vain. At last Mrs. Manners's head, clothed in a high and curious-looking old-fashioned nightcap, appeared cautiously at her bedroom window, and, seeing George, she at once opened it.

"Why, George, is that you? What a fright you have given me!" she said. "And that can't surely be Miss Williams?"

"Yes, mother, it is," answered George. "Come down and let us in; Miss Williams is worn out with fatigue."

"There's nothing the matter, is there?" went on Mrs. Manners, anxiously. "Oh! George—there's nothing happened to your father, has there?"

"No, no—nothing," said George, somewhat impatiently. "Come and open the door, mother, and then we will tell you the news."

In a few minutes Mrs. Manners descended, having removed her extraordinary head-gear before she did so, and after unlocking the door kissed them both very heartily, and led the way into the dining-room, and began unfastening the window-shutters.

"And now, what will you have?" she said, hospitably. "Why, you look quite worn out, my dear," she continued, addressing Miss Williams. "George, where have you been? You haven't run away together, and got married on the sly, have you?" she added, with a rather nervous laugh.

"No, mother—no!" said George, quickly; and he turned away his head as he spoke. "I will

tell you by-and-by how we are here," he continued, considerably, glancing at the half-fainting woman by his side, who was now scarcely able to stand, between fatigue, shame, and grief. "Get Amy to bed first, and give her some tea ; but don't ask her any questions, and then I will tell you everything."

"Very well, Georgie," said Mrs. Manners. "Come upstairs to my room, Miss Williams, dear, and lie down at once, and then I'll get you some breakfast, and George will tell me all your news afterwards. No, no—you mustn't break down," she went on, when they reached the bedroom ; and Amy, utterly overcome by her kindness, flung her arms round her neck and burst into passionate tears.

"Don't be very angry with me," sobbed out the unhappy woman, pillowing her aching head on Mrs. Manners's kindly bosom. "Don't blame me very much ; but you know how well I love George."

"Yes, dear, yes ; but it will be all right now. George is as fond of you as can be, I am sure. It was only that nonsense about Sir Hugh which vexed him."

"Oh ! Mrs. Manners, you don't know—you don't know !" sobbed Amy ; and, full of foreboding, after having succeeded in partly composing her, Mrs. Manners returned to her stepson.

She found George sitting by the table, leaning his head on his hand, when she entered the dining-room, and as he removed it she was struck with the painful change which had taken place in his expression.

"What is it, George?" said she, advancing, and holding out her hand to him.

"Mother," answered George, taking it in his own, "I am about to ask you a great favour—to ask you to do a great kindness—but there has been much love between us, has there not?"

"Yes, darling, that there has," said Mrs. Manners, kissing his forehead. "I will do anything for you, George—anything you ask me."

"Be a friend then to the friendless woman upstairs," said George, in a low, broken voice. "Give her a home here, mother, for my sake."

"Yes, Georgie," answered Mrs. Manners; but her face grew very grave.

"She—she has no one else to protect her," George went on. "She has done me a cruel wrong; but forgive her, mother, as I have."

"What has she done, George?" asked Mrs. Manners.

"Taught me to love her, when to do so was a sin—a hateful sin," answered George, rising excitedly. "Mother," he continued, beginning to pace the room with restless steps, "the girl I

hoped to marry—the girl I have held in my arms—that I have been jealous of—been a fool about—was all the while the wife of another man.”

“Another man!” exclaimed Mrs. Manners, utterly astonished. “Impossible!”

“Yes,” said George; “when she came here—from the beginning she deceived us. This must be my consolation, mother,” he added, with a sort of painful smile, “not knowingly have I fallen—not knowingly led her to do her husband wrong.”

“But, George, I cannot understand it!”

Then George told his stepmother Amy’s story as she had told it to him, and Mrs. Manners listened to it with considerable indignation and anger, for on the subject of marriage her opinions were very strong.

“She is a bad girl,” she said, after George had finished; “a bad, wicked woman. If she was married she had no right to come here—no right to lead you on. Oh! my poor boy, don’t grieve after her—she isn’t worth it.”

“It’s easy talking,” said George, bitterly.

“Ay, I know that; but, Georgie, what do you want? Not surely for her to stay on here? Let her go back to her husband, and you try to forget her—that’s what is right.”

“No, no,” said George, quickly, a jealous pang darting into his heart; “no, she will never do that,

she could not do that *now*. It is not I alone who am suffering, mother," he added; "she too—poor, poor girl, has learnt to care for me."

"More shame be to her then," said Mrs. Manners, indignantly. "I've no patience with such work. A man's wife should be true to him at any rate, whoever else in the world is."

"She thinks she is not his wife."

"Then she was not fit to be yours," said Mrs. Manners. "George, dear, I have been very fond-like of her. She nursed my little darling who left us, and was very good to me at that sore time; but for all that I'd rather she had died than brought this trouble upon you."

"Don't let her death lie at our door, however, mother," answered George. "She is already broken down with despair and sorrow. She would destroy herself, I believe, rather than live again with this miserable man; and she has no friend to look to—no one in whom to trust. You said you would do what I asked you. Let her stay on here then—give her at least the shelter of a home."

"And your father?" hesitated Mrs. Manners.

"He need know nothing of this; or, if you think it right to tell him, I will gladly pay what he thinks necessary for her maintenance. For the rest she can still pass for the children's governess."

"But, George——"

"What, mother?" asked George, rather impatiently, for he was unused to any opposition from his gentle stepmother.

"How about the sin, George?" said Mrs. Manners, solemnly. "How can I have her here, and you coming and going—you who would love her still?"

"Yes, mother," answered George, sharply; "I love her still—but I would not have asked you to do this had I meant to remain in England. Another month and I shall have left it for ever."

"Oh, my lad!" said Mrs. Manners, bursting into tears; "and are we to part. Is a stranger like this to come between us? Oh! Georgie, you must love her well."

"Be kind to her, and do not think about me," said George, holding out his hand. "Nay, mother, do not vex yourself like this. Men feel these things less than women, they say. I shall have my work—so, for my sake, try to help and comfort this poor, broken heart."

"And my boy has to go away alone with his sore one," sobbed Mrs. Manners. "Georgie, you are a good man; but—but it is very hard."

"Life is often so," answered George Manners. "Come, mother, will you give me your promise?"

"I have loved you like my own," said Mrs.

Manners, drying her tears, "and I would give my life for them or you, and you shall ask nothing of me in vain. I will be, for your sake, a mother to this poor creature ; but for all that——"

"I wont hear another word," said George, kissing her. "I can leave poor Amy with some comfort now, for I know you will do what you say."

He asked to see the unfortunate woman for whom he had begged his mother's protection before he returned to Oldcastle, in the middle of the day ; and when pale and trembling Amy came down at his request, the last remnant of George's anger died away at the sight of her stricken face.

"I should not have disturbed you perhaps," he said, kindly, as she came into the room, "but I am anxious to say a few words to you alone before I leave. Does your head ache very much?"

"It does a little," she answered, and she put up her hand to it as she spoke with a certain vagueness of expression which alarmed George.

"You will have plenty of time for rest now," he continued. "What I want to say is, that you—my sister," and here his voice faltered slightly, "need have now no more anxiety or suffering as regards seeking a new home, or one away among strangers. I have made arrangements with my mother, and you will live here as long as you wish

to do so ; and I expect you will look upon me," he added, holding out his hand to her, "as your banker in future, and if I can do anything else for you, you have but to ask."

"And this is the reward," said Amy, her eyes filling with tears, which came fast streaming down her wan cheeks, "this the reward for deceiving and wronging you ; truly, George, you are heaping coals of fire upon my head."

"I have loved you, Amy," answered George, simply—"we forgive much in love."

"I—I am very unworthy."

"We must not talk of it," said George, resolutely. "Let the past be blotted out between us, Amy. When we meet, and it will be but seldom, let us be as if you were indeed my sister. I will strive never to forget this, and you must help me."

"Yes, George ; but must you go ?"

"Could I see you, do you think, day by day, and keep this in my mind ? I am not strong enough for that."

"And I am driving you away—driving you from your home."

"Not always," said he, kindly. "I will come occasionally to the old place, and then it will be my happiness to see that you have regained yours."

"You are very generous."

"And when we are old people," continued George, with a painful smile.

"I will be in my grave, George. If I did not feel I was fast hastening to it, I would not accept your sacrifice ; but in a little while you can come home."

"Why do you unman me thus?" said George, much agitated. "I am doing what I pray and trust is best for you, and you send me away with cruel words like these ringing in my ears."

"It will be the best for you in the end," answered Amy, in a broken voice. "You will grieve a little while, I know—for I have loved you so much ; but afterwards, some happier—some better woman——"

"No one can fill your place to me," said George, his face flushing strangely.

"Is that really so?" asked Amy, looking at him, with a sort of joy stealing into her miserable heart. "Will you come sometimes to your old friend's grave, George, and think of me still amid your busy life?"

"Why do you ask?" he answered, gloomily. "You know what you have done ; but enough of this—do not try me too far."

"I am very tired," said Amy, the next minute. "I feel so oddly here ;" and she tottered, and put up her hand to her head as she said this.

With a violent effort George mastered his emotions, for he saw she was scarcely able to support herself, and taking her hand led her gently to a chair.

"You are nervous," he said, "and I will not keep you up any longer now. I will go to-night to the Mounseys," he added, quietly, "and will make the best explanation that I can; and if—if Captain Clayton should be there—don't start and look so terrified—there is no chance of him finding you here. He will never probably hear of you, and if he does, only as the children's governess. But I will let you know; only keep your mind easy, and do not distress yourself uselessly. And now I will call my mother, and give you into her charge."

When Mrs. Manners came into the room her eyes were red with crying, but she smiled and held out her hand to her stepson.

"Well, Georgie, have you settled it?" she said.

"Yes, mother," he answered, with a smile also; and, taking Amy's hand, he led her up to Mrs. Manners and placed it in hers.

"I give you a new daughter to-day," he said; "and myself a sister. Good-bye, dear Amy! Mother, I am sure she will be best in bed; you had better go with her now, and I will see you again before I start;" and once more pressing Amy's hand he opened the door for them, and as

they went out together turned back with a bitter sigh.

He went that night; a few hours after he returned to Oldcastle, to Mrs. Mounsey's, and was received, when he first entered, by that lady with great coldness. His heart was beating fiercely, and his face was flushed a deep, dusky red, as the servant flung open the drawing-room door and announced him; but, as his eyes glanced quickly round the room, he saw it was only occupied by its ordinary inhabitants, and that the person he alike hated and dreaded to see was not there.

"How are you, Mr. Manners?" said Laura Clayton, rising and offering him her hand, for she was ashamed of her sister's rudeness, which, however, George had scarcely noticed; and Mr. Mounsey was asleep.

"I am very well. I have come to apologize to Mrs. Mounsey," answered George, rather nervously.

"Oh, for running away with the governess, I suppose," sneered Mrs. Mounsey, "and giving us no end of trouble in looking for her. Well, I must say——"

"Mr. Manners's sister was ill, you know, Louisa. I hope she is better to-day?" said Laura.

"Yes—no—that is, she is still very ill," replied George, confusedly—his truthful, honest nature

shrinking from the lie he was forced to act. "Yes, that was the reason, Mrs. Mounsey; but Miss Williams wrote to you, did she not?"

"Oh yes; but not to wait till our return—to start in the middle of the night with a young man like you! Miss Williams can expect no character from me, at any rate, when she seeks another situation."

"She wont need one," answered George, haughtily. "She is going to live with my mother."

"Indeed! In what capacity?"

"The children will not part with her," said George. "Little Milly has never been the same since she left."

"Am I to understand, then, that without notice she has left me? I will give her no salary for the time she has been here."

"She does not expect any," said George, controlling his temper with great difficulty. "Make your mind easy, Mrs. Mounsey, on that point."

"It seems to be a very mysterious affair altogether, I think," said Mrs. Mounsey. "If you were all so fond of her at home, why did she leave you?"

"The sea air was too strong for her my mother thought," answered George; "but she has only lost strength since she has been here."

"She is very delicate, I fear," said Laura Clayton, who had been studying George's face with her brilliant, clever eyes since he had come in.

"Yes, I am afraid so, Miss Clayton," replied George; and he turned away from the angry lady of the house, and began talking to Laura on some different subject.

"We expected our cousin, Captain Clayton of the 3rd, to-day," said Mrs. Mounsey, presently; for she did not care to be left out of the conversation long, and saw she had not gained much during her encounter with George Manners.

"Indeed!" answered George; "has he not come then?"

"No; he telegraphed from Leeds to say he would arrive to-morrow instead. He is a very fine, handsome young man, but has a most unfortunate history attached to his name;" and then George had to listen again to poor Amy's miserable story.

"She was a beautiful young woman, I hear, this foolish, runaway wife," went on Mrs. Mounsey, "and Hugh is madly in love with her still. He is employing detectives to trace her, as the idea of her having committed suicide has rather lately fallen through; for a young lady exactly answering her description has been sworn to by a lodging-house keeper in London as having stayed with her

several weeks. This woman thought she was seeking some situation or other from what she said, and she called herself Miss Guthrie, wasn't it, Laura? And now there is some trace, he writes us word, of her having come North; but we will hear all when Hugh comes. I am sure I hope he will find her, though I rather pity her too if he does."

"What kind of man is he?" asked George, his voice trembling in spite of himself.

"A man of the most violent passions," answered Mrs. Mounsey; "I remember him as a child, how he used to storm and rave if anything crossed him, and he has grown up the same. They say he was frantically jealous of his pretty wife, and ready to shoot any one who even spoke to her."

"And was there no truth in the first marriage?" hesitated George.

"I hope not, Mr. Manners," laughed Mrs. Mounsey; "it would be awkward for the family, would it not, to have our first cousin figuring in the Court on a charge of bigamy?"

"She must have believed it, I think," said Laura Clayton; "poor thing, I have often pitied her."

"It was a painful position," answered George, and the next minute he sighed deeply, and shortly afterwards rose to take his leave.

"Will you dine with us to-morrow to meet Hugh?" said Mrs. Mounsey, as she held out her hand. She was beginning to think it might not be convenient to quarrel with Mr. Manners.

"Not to-morrow, thank you," he replied.

"Well, he will stay a few days; I hope we will see you before he leaves?"

"I shall be very glad."

"What on earth is the matter with Mr. Manners?" said Mrs. Mounsey, the moment the door closed after him, to her sister. "I never saw a man so altered."

"He does indeed look very ill," answered Laura.

"And so nervous and queer. I cannot make it out—I fancy something very disagreeable must have occurred at home. And did you notice he did not know what to say about the sick child? In fact, I don't believe in it at all."

"Something must have annoyed him," said Laura; and then she rose restlessly and went to the window. A vague suspicion had come into her mind—she was beginning to believe there was some previous connexion or attachment between George Manners and Miss Williams.



CHAPTER XVIII.

HUGH CLAYTON.

I AM very sorry for you, Hugh," said Laura Clayton, in her sweet, clear voice.

These words were addressed by Miss Clayton on the following afternoon to a dark, sullen-looking man, about thirty, who was standing near her in the embrasure of one of the windows at Windsor Street, and he answered her by fiercely grasping her hand.

"Do you feel how mine burns?" he said. "But that is nothing to the raging fever which consumes me sometimes. I must do something, Laura, or I shall die."

"But if she does not love you?" answered Laura. "Think for a moment, Hugh—would you wish her to return?"

"Yes," said Captain Clayton, his sunken eyes gleaming with extraordinary vehemency as he spoke. "Yes, I'll have her back, dead or alive. Do I love her or hate her most, Laura, do you

think? For I would rather strike her dead, than any longer lead this life of infernal torment."

"Hush, Hugh, do not use such language."

"She deceived me so," said Captain Clayton, "that is what I hate the most—pretending she was reconciled and had forgiven me, and then without a word or a line to steal away—when she knew I loved her too well—too well——" and he turned away his head, gnawing his lips in restless agony.

"I fancy you had half terrified her," said Laura.

"I took her without a penny," went on Captain Clayton, in a low, fierce tone of concentrated anger, "and lavished on her every luxury I could buy. I surrounded her with wealth which she had never known, and to repay me thus—curse her!" he continued, between his set teeth; "she has blasted my whole life—she has driven me to drink and to destruction—and she'll drive me to hellfire in the end."

"You give way to a morbid excitement," answered Laura, very gravely. "Why do you not rouse yourself, and act like a man?—a disappointed and unhappy one, if you like, but not as a mad-man?"

"What do girls like you know," replied Captain Clayton, angrily, "of such feelings as mine? But I have sworn to revenge myself for what she has made me suffer, and I'll hunt her down like a dog.

There was a manager of a register office for governesses in London, in Berners Street, who did not give me very clear answers. We traced her, or thought we traced her, to this place; but the woman there said, when we questioned her, that there was no such name as Guthrie on her books; yet that was the name the lodging-house keeper we found she had stayed with said she went by when she was with her. Well, just as I and the detective Stevens were leaving this register office, a brazen-looking Frenchwoman ran after us. 'Monsieur,' she said, addressing me in her broken English, 'will you permit me to see the portrait which you have just shown to the person within?' I asked her why, and she said, 'I believe I can give Monsieur some information which the person within did not give;' and she hinted she would accept a bribe for it. This, you may be sure, I gladly promised her; and we took her into an hotel, and there Mademoiselle proceeded to tell us she had been sitting waiting behind a screen in the register office till the manager was disengaged, and had overheard us questioning her, and that from my description she thought at once she recognised the lady I was inquiring after; for that last autumn she had frequently seen a young lady there seeking a situation, whom she believed to be the same. Then I showed her Amy's photograph——"

"Amy!" exclaimed Laura. "Is her name Amy?"

"Yes," said Captain Clayton, "her name is Amy; and when I showed her portrait to this Frenchwoman, she cried out at once, 'Yes, it is the same! the same! Only she was more *passé*, more worn, when I saw her, and she was not called then the name you mention—Guthrie, is it? No, it was some common English name,' and Mademoiselle tried to remember. Presently she said, 'I have it, I have it—it was Williams.'"

"Williams!" said Laura, with much excitement in her tone. "What was she like?"

"Like a fair, beautiful girl, with the colour of a wild rose, and small, straight, regular features," answered Captain Clayton. "But I will show you her portrait," he added, unfastening the locket which he wore attached to his watch-chain as he spoke, and handing it to his cousin.

With a violent effort, Laura controlled the exclamation which rose on her lips as she opened it, for in spite of the great change in her appearance—in spite of months of wasting grief, anxiety, and pain, she yet recognised in the lovely, smiling, girlish face the picture portrayed, the features of her sister's governess, Miss Williams.

"She is very pretty," faltered Laura, for she was almost overcome at the discovery she had made.

"Yes," said Captain Clayton, taking the locket from her hand, and looking at it long and passionately, "she was some excuse, was she not, for a man acting as I did?"

"But, Hugh, tell me the truth," said Miss Clayton, earnestly; "tell me it, I entreat you—what right had that other woman to claim to be your wife? What cruel wrong had you done her since she persuaded this—this unhappy girl to leave you as she did?"

"She had none," answered Captain Clayton, and his dark face darkened as he spoke.

"I can scarcely believe it. Let me look at her again?" said Laura, holding out her hand once more for the locket. "She does not look like a woman who could act as she did without some real cause."

"That cursed fool made her believe her, I suppose," muttered Captain Clayton.

"And you can speak thus," answered Laura, indignantly, "of the poor woman you had wronged and cast aside? Of the mother of your child? Hugh, I am ashamed of you—ashamed of my cousin."

"What right had she to follow me?" he answered, sullenly. "Other men do these things, and don't have them always cast in their teeth."

"Yes, what right?" said Laura, with heightened

colour and sparkling eyes. "Yes, Hugh, I believe she had some right—and—and I do not think I would help you to find your wife, even if I could."

"Give me back the locket then," said Captain Clayton. "I would not have shown it to many people; but it will help to trace her, and there is little doubt now she left London for the North. But I was telling you about this Frenchwoman. After we had paid her handsomely for the information, she went on to say that this Miss Williams used to come often to the register office, and tried for several situations in vain, but at last the manager told her she had procured her one in a clergyman's family in the North, and she had never heard of her since. She said she particularly remembered this Miss Williams, on account of her handsome dress and ornaments, and as I have spared nothing on Amy, there is no doubt it was herself. As soon as we had heard all this, we returned to the register office, but the manager either had, or pretended to have forgotten all about it. She said so many ladies came there she could not remember them, and declared she had no books she could refer to, and asked Mademoiselle very sharply why she interfered with other people's affairs, and perhaps got them into trouble? But I did not like her manner, and there is little question in my mind that this Frenchwoman was

speaking the truth; for we found the cabman we believe drove Amy to King's Cross, when she started for the North. He wouldn't swear to her, but he thought he remembered the face, and he could not recollect where her luggage was addressed. But Stevens is a sharp fellow, and between him and the Frenchwoman we'll ferret her out, even if I spend every penny I have in the search—and then let her rue the day!"

"Poor girl! poor girl!" said Laura Clayton. "And George Manners knew this story," she thought. "George Manners took her away, and hid her, when I told her Hugh was coming. I see it all now—he loves her, and she has told him who she is."

A great struggle took place in Laura's heart after she made this discovery—a great struggle, full of pain, disappointment, and the tempting knowledge that she had it in her power to betray her unfortunate rival to the man who, claiming a legal right over her, could thus force her at any time from George Manners's path for ever.

"But he loves her," thought Laura; and one by one a hundred subtle little links were clasped together in her mind which showed her that he did, and that she, not Laura herself, had been often haunting his memory and his words, in their long and sometimes almost confidential interviews.

"He admired me," thought Laura, bitterly; "and he was striving to forget her—why should I shut my eyes to the unflattering truth?"

"And what shall I do?" she asked herself. It was a great temptation; but after a few minutes' reflection Laura's strong and noble heart resisted it.

"It might lead to bloodshed and misery," she determined. "I will wash my hands of it; nay, I will warn George how near has been her escape—how closely she is pursued."

Captain Clayton had not been so confidential to his elder cousin as to Laura. In fact, his restless and excited manner had greatly annoyed Mrs. Mounsey; and during dinner she was shocked and astonished at the quantity and strength of the potations he indulged in, for he habitually drank brandy now, and was anything but sparing in its use; and Mrs. Mounsey declared to her sister, when the ladies came upstairs, that she was almost afraid of Hugh Clayton.

"What a mad look he has sometimes," she said, "and how vindictive he is. That man will cut somebody else's throat, or his own, before he is done, I am convinced; and I would not be that poor wretched woman he is seeking for, if he finds her, for the whole world."

Naturally, these words of her sister's confirmed

Laura in her resolution to keep Miss Williams's secret ; and to his surprise, George Manners received during the same evening a note, requesting him to meet her on the following afternoon, in a retired road leading to the cemetery, as "she had something of great importance to communicate."

He went at the appointed time, and the two met with considerable embarrassment, for Laura had determined that this interview should decide the fate of her whole future life.

"You would be astonished to receive my note?" she said, blushing deeply, as she took George's offered hand, "but I have made a discovery which I think will be no surprise to you."

"What is it?" asked George, greatly disturbed.

"That Miss Williams is my cousin Hugh's lost wife," said Miss Clayton, fixing her eyes steadily on George's face ; and, if she had needed it, she read there at once the confirmation of her suspicions.

"He showed me her picture," continued Laura ; "there is no doubt ; but I see by your face you knew all this before."

"I have known it two days," said George, slowly and painfully.

"But two days !" echoed Laura, in surprise.

"Yes ; when—when you told her your cousin was coming, she was forced to confide in me this secret, which only one other member of our family

knew before. My cousin, Sir Hugh Manners, recognised her again, when he saw her at Narbrough, for he had met her in India with Captain Clayton."

"And you did not know?" said Laura, with a kind of hope springing up in her heart.

"No," answered George; and he turned away his head, and bit his lips, to hide the emotions he could scarcely suppress.

"I have told no one," said Laura. "I guessed at once that you knew—that you had some interest in this young lady; and Hugh displayed such a bitter and vindictive spirit, and such a determined purpose to discover her, that I made up my mind to leave it to your judgment how to act, so I asked you to meet me here to-day."

"You have behaved as few women would have done," answered George—"with nobleness and discretion which I never saw equalled, and I scarcely know how to tell you what I feel to you for your conduct."

"But——" said Laura, and her face flushed and her breath came short. She wanted to ask George what those feelings were.

"He has no suspicion, then?" inquired George, after a moment's pause.

"None that she has been in our house or yours; but he has traced her to a lodging in London, and from there to some register office in Berners Street;

and a Frenchwoman, who saw her at this office, recognised at once her portrait, and remembered she had then borne the name of Williams."

"What ! he knows that ?" said George, turning pale.

"Yes ; but the manager of the register office would give him no information, and he has only this Frenchwoman's word to go on, and from what he said she does not seem to be a very creditable person. She assured him that the manager had told her that she had procured Miss Williams a situation in a clergyman's family in the North ; but the manager either had or pretended to have forgotten all about it, and he could get nothing from her ; but on this clue he has come North, and his idea is she is hidden some way in Scotland."

"It is a miserable story," said George.

"It is, indeed, Mr. Manners."

"She—she—this unhappy young lady believes that the poor woman who claimed to be previously married to Captain Clayton, really was so. Do you ?"

"Hugh declared to me yesterday that she was not ; but his eyes fell as he spoke, and I believe he had deceived her somehow. Perhaps gone through some mock ceremony, which she believed to be a true one."

"It is possible," answered George, thoughtfully.

"But I think his marriage with Miss Williams must have been a binding one, or he never dare claim her back so openly. He is, are you aware, employing London detectives to seek her?"

"Poor, poor Amy!" said George, almost in a whisper.

"You knew her well, I suppose?" asked Laura, with a fast beating heart, "before she came here?"

"Yes," replied George; and then, after glancing at the agitated face of his companion, he came to a sudden resolution.

"Miss Clayton," he said—"Laura"—and his voice faltered, "we have been friends of late—intimate friends. Have you ever guessed my secret?"

"You care for her," answered Laura, in a low, sharp voice of pain.

"I will tell you all," said George, turning away his head, and not appearing to notice her too evident emotion. "I met her of course as a stranger—as my sister's governess—during last autumn at Narbrough, and gradually became greatly interested in her, and finally deeply attached to her. But I struggled with my feelings—not from any unworthy motives as regards her position, but because I was a poor man, and hampered with a debt which my honour bound me to make the first consideration of my life to discharge. But I was

thrown with her, and after awhile I fancied she also had learnt to care for me, and this determined me to ask her to be my wife. Just, however, at this very time my cousin Hugh Manners returned to Narbrough, and one evening—doubtless with the intention of breaking off our intimacy—he pointedly before me made some allusion to a previous acquaintance he had had with her, though before this they had met as perfect strangers; and her uncontrollable agitation at his remark left me no option but to believe he was speaking the truth. Stung with jealous anger, I then taxed her with the fact, which she did not deny; only crying, and begging me to believe in her. And as time went on—after she had shown the greatest kindness and attention to my mother, and a little sister we lost—I—against my better judgment—against everything I ought to have remembered—yielded again to the overpowering attraction she possessed for me, and we became, I considered at least, engaged. But my happiness, if it were ever such, tormented with jealous doubts, as I always was, was very brief. My eldest sister discovered and convinced me that a secret correspondence and meetings were carried on between the girl I hoped to marry and my cousin Hugh. This, as you may imagine, was more than I could bear; and after seeing with my own eyes an interview take place between them, I

left Narbrough, determined, whatever it cost me, never to see her more. I wrote to her to this effect from here, reproaching her with her treachery and disgrace, and then left England for Russia; after giving her to understand that I would not expect to see her at Narbrough on my return. What was my astonishment, then, to find her at your house when I came back. My mother, who is greatly attached to her, having, at her request, kept this a secret from me, in the hope that we should thus meet and become reconciled; and when we did——”

“What! You have seen her sometimes alone, then?”

“But once; but she then again solemnly declared—so solemnly, I was almost persuaded to believe her—that my cousin Hugh was no lover of hers, only that he knew her secret—and she spoke the truth.”

“I—I pity her,” said Miss Clayton, with faltering tongue; “and—you also.”

“I thank you for your kindness and sympathy, Miss Clayton; and your great goodness I shall never forget. You have soothed lately many a bitter hour for me.”

“I am glad,” said poor Laura.

“I have made up my mind to leave England for

good," continued George, slowly. "I—I am better away."

"And she—my cousin's wife—will she live with your mother?"

"We have offered her a home at Narbrough, for she is at present utterly unfit to struggle in the world—and I pray God she may find peace!"

"And you will go away?—George Manners, I honour and respect you with my whole heart;" and as she said this, Laura Clayton turned round to him again her noble, beautiful face, from which the last few painful minutes had driven every particle of colour. But never had she looked handsomer than when she said this, and held out her hand to him, and in her heart gave up his love for ever.

"I am glad you have told me," she continued, with a kind of simple dignity. "It is better that friends like we are should have no such secrets between them; and from first to last I admire and appreciate your conduct."

"Nay," said George, stung with self-reproach, and full of admiration at her generous words; "do not say that—but I was very unhappy."

"Time and absence," said Laura, gently, "they say, softens all grief; and I am sure you will be happier away. You are not a man who could learn

to reconcile yourself to live in any great sin or wrong——”

“Do not judge me too leniently,” answered George, his face flushing as he spoke. “I am not so strong as you think me—not so strong as I once thought myself.”

“You are a good man,” said Laura, “and you will meet with your reward. But my sister has written to invite you to dine with us to-day—and you will come?”

“I cannot,” replied George, quickly, “I cannot.”

“It will be painful to you, I know, and I would not have asked you but for this reason—it will prevent Louisa talking of Miss Williams, you being there: and as Hugh has been out all the morning and leaves to-morrow, she has had no opportunity of doing so yet, and he will in all probability thus leave without any discovery—you had better come.”

“Well, if you think so; but when I think how he acted—how he tormented this poor, poor——”

“Your feelings are natural,” said Laura, unable to suppress a sigh at the deep interest George’s tone displayed in Amy’s wrongs; “but for her sake it would be wise.”

“I will come, then,” he answered, “and try to control myself.”

"I have no fear of you," said Laura, with a sort of smile. "But now I must say good-bye—Louisa will wonder where I have disappeared to this afternoon."

"Allow me to escort you home, then," said George. And all the way there they talked quietly on different subjects; only when they reached Windsor Street George again thanked her; and Laura's lips slightly quivered as she answered—

"Mr. Manners, I will do for you what I can—I wish I could do more," and then she held out her hand to him; but something in her face made George understand her feelings, and this knowledge gave almost as keen a pang to him as that which he had caused her generous heart.

Then with almost intense loathing at the idea, he returned to his lodgings to dress for dinner at the Mounseys. But as a man must put on his boots even if he is going to be hanged, so George was forced to arrange his necktie straight even when he was going to meet Captain Clayton; and appeared in the drawing-room at Windsor Street at the appointed time perfectly well dressed, and as calm and quiet in his manner as on ordinary occasions.

After Mrs. Mounsey had received him she turned round, and with a slight wave of her hand attracted his attention to a certain easy-chair, in

the depth of which a tall, dark man was lolling back.

"My cousin Captain Clayton, Mr. Manners," said Mrs. Mounsey.

George bowed, and Captain Clayton rose slightly, and made a distant, haughty salutation, as much as to say, "and who may Mr. Manners be?" for he was one of those men who presume (having no higher position of his own) on holding Her Majesty's commission; and "some snob of a civilian," was a phrase very frequently heard from his lips; while his overbearing and ungentlemanly conduct had made him extremely unpopular in his own regiment among men of a different class and stamp.

"We are all half dead with the heat," said Mrs. Mounsey, affectedly.

"In this beastly smoky town of yours, what else can you expect?" said Captain Clayton. "Why don't you make Mounsey take you a country house, Louisa? I can't conceive any one living in such an atmosphere if they can help it."

"Yet many do so from choice," said George.

"Oh yes, shopkeepers and artisans, I daresay; but I was thinking of a different class."

"Yet shopkeepers and artisans have pretty much the same lungs as that different class," replied George.

"Have they? Can't say—don't know any of the lot; only know Oldcastle is a beastly hole."

"I like it," answered George, with heightened colour, and an almost irresistible feeling of antagonism rising in his heart; "and I spend most of my days among shopkeepers and artisans—in a large way."

"Oh, Mr. Manners, what nonsense," said Mrs. Mounsey. "How can you make Hugh believe anything of the kind? Mr. Manners belongs to an old Northumbrian family, Hugh, and Sir Hugh Manners, his cousin, is at present the head of the house."

"Indeed?" said Captain Clayton, in a very different tone; for he had that veneration for rank which we see so frequently in those whose birth is inferior to their fortunes. "Do you mean Sir Hugh Manners, who was formerly of 'Ours?'"

"I do not know your regiment, sir," answered George, with a scarcely suppressed touch of haughty sarcasm.

"It is the 3rd."

"I believe my cousin was out in India with the 3rd."

"Yes," said Clayton, "at Calcutta;" and his face darkened as he spoke. "I knew him well there," he added, "and I lately met him in town. I am happy to make the acquaintance of a relation of my old chum."

George bowed and bit his lips under his moustaches; but at that moment the door opened, and Laura Clayton, paler than her wont, and with faint marks round her fine eyes, as if from crying, entered the room, and held out her hand to him with her usual cordiality.

"Is Mr. Mounsey not ready yet?" asked Mrs. Mounsey, peevishly. "How tiresome he is—never dressed in time. Ring the bell, Laura, and I will order up dinner."

Just, however, as it was announced the host rushed in, wiping his red face, and apparently in a state of great excitement.

"Excuse me, ladies, keeping you waiting. Ah, Mr. Mannors, how do? I have been showing my want of you, you see, by being late, ha! ha! ha! It's hot to-day—very hot, mamma."

"You seem heated, at any rate," replied that lady, severely.

"We had a very interesting case to-day in Court—very interesting—a man——"

"Mr. Mounsey, the dinner is waiting," said Mrs. Mounsey.

"To be sure, to be sure; I forgot. In that case, Clayton, will you take down mamma? and, Mr. Mannors, Miss Clayton is waiting for you to escort her."

Laura's hand trembled a little when she first laid

it on George's arm; but never had he felt such admiration and regard for her as during the next half-hour, when he saw the quiet dignity of her manner, and the graceful ease with which she accepted the position now between them. But Laura was not a woman to waste her affections and feelings on an unreturned attachment. Either she could control them well, or they had not originally been strong enough to form the entire happiness or misery of her life. So after the first bitterness of her disappointment was over, she began to remember there were other pleasures and duties still left for her, independent of the love of George Manners. She was not, in fact, one of those who "give the world for love, and deem it all well lost." For Laura there were many things besides. She loved the world and the world's good name. She loved what she knew money would procure her—the attention which was so pleasant to her, though she might know it was purchased. She had loved George Manners, and had he returned her attachment she would have sacrificed much for him—what she at least considered much, for she would have sacrificed *wealth*.

But now it was all over she told herself, and she made up her mind at once as to her future destiny. The weaker woman who loved George also would not have acted thus wisely. She would have clung

to some vain hope—caught at some deluding shadow—rather than endure the wrench of parting. Both had loved him, but how differently! To one he was everything, and without him all life was desolate. To the other he could have given a new happiness and a joy which, when she found was not for her, she calmly resigned with a sigh.

Something of this difference in their feelings towards him was shown to George himself on the following day after he had met Captain Clayton, for the early post brought him a letter from his stepmother, expressing the greatest anxiety as to Amy's health. "She never scarcely speaks, or lifts her head," Mrs. Manners informed him, "and cannot even bear the children in the room, though Milly will hardly leave her door; and yesterday I sent for Dr. Ruthyen, who shook his head as he went out. 'What's breaking her heart, ma'am?' he said, in his blunt way. 'This is a case beyond me—the mind's diseased.' Come down as soon as you can, dear George," went on the good woman, "for I am very anxious about her, and I think perhaps she would be better if she knew something about her unfortunate husband, for I notice how she starts at every bell, as if she were expecting something; and these two mornings has eagerly asked about letters, and when I told her there were none, I thought both times she was going to faint."

George Manners scarcely knew how to act after reading this letter ; but later in the day he received another from Miss Clayton, which decided him.

“Dear Mr. Manners,” wrote Laura, “I write this note to you at once, to relieve your anxiety, which I know must be great, and that of the unfortunate young lady in whom you are interested. My cousin left this morning for Scotland without any discovery of the identity of Miss W——, and the object of his search. He will visit my sister probably on his return from the North, but by that time the interest of Miss W—— leaving us so suddenly will have quite died away in her mind, as she is at present seeking a new governess, and she will also have then another source of excitement and conversation ; for I must claim your congratulations, as I wrote last night to accept the offer of marriage which Mr. Peel did me the honour to make at his fête, but which I then asked for a few days to consider on before making my decision. On reflection, however, I have come to the conclusion that it will be for my own happiness and his to accept it, and I have done so ; and this morning Mr. Peel has urged that our marriage should be no longer delayed than the time which will be required for the necessary preparations. Under these circumstances I do not think you need fear my sister making any allusion

to, or even remembering, the *governess*, as Hugh will only return for the ceremony, at which I trust you also (if you are still in England) will be present.

“ With kind regards, I remain,

“ Your sincere friend,

“ LAURA CLAYTON.”

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